MUHAMMAD'S GRAVE

Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society

LEOR HALEVI

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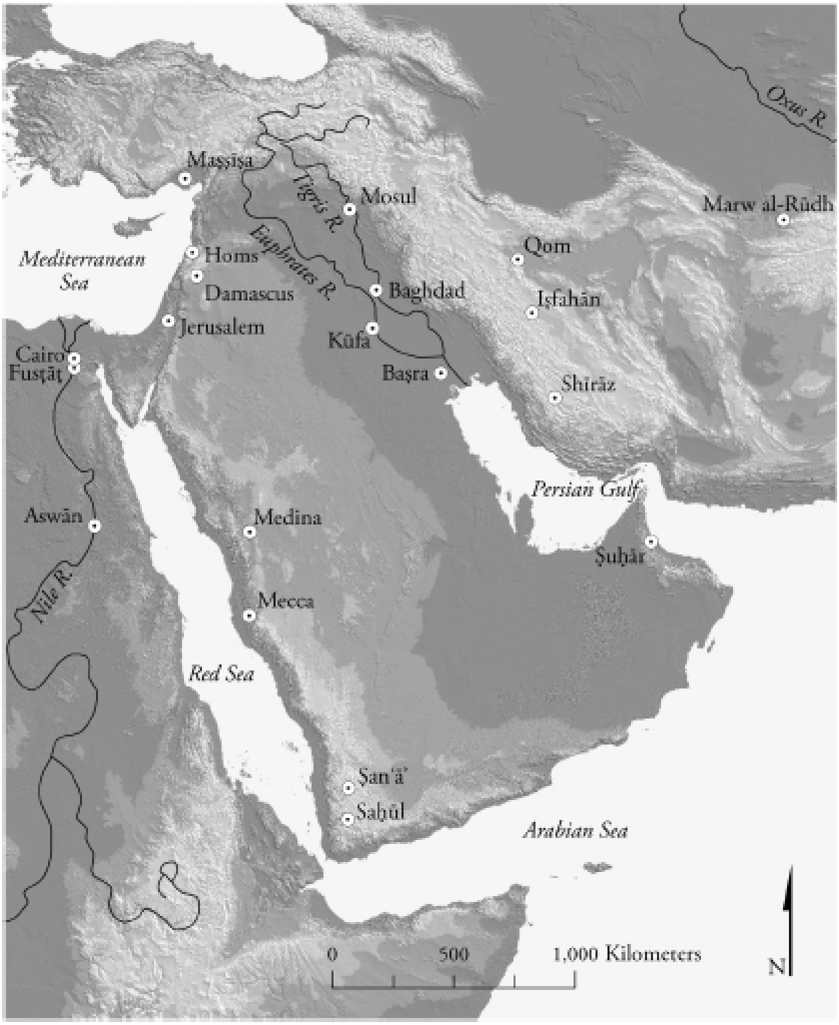
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Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the Eastern Mediterranean World

INTRODUCTION

Funerary Traditions and the Making of Islamic Society

Perhaps the story should begin with an oral tradition set in the city of Medina in the year 632, moments before the death of Muḥammad's daughter. Sensing the end of her life, after suffering in illness for several months, Fāṭima recognized the time had come to prepare for her own death and burial. So she asked Salmā, a woman in her company, to pour water for a bath. Having purified her body in a ritual ablution, Fāṭima dressed in new clothes and instructed Salmā to place her bed in the middle of the room. Fāṭima then lay down facing in the direction of the *qibla,* the focal point of Muslim prayers, and spoke her last words: "The hour of my death has come and I have already purified myself. May no one bare my shoulder." When Fāṭima's husband returned home, Salmā informed him of his wife's wishes, and he complied, burying his wife without subjecting her body to the standard ritual of corpse washing.[1]

In this book I examine oral traditions, like this one, in order to understand how in the first period of their history Muslims strove, in different cities in different ways, to fashion a new society that would respond to the tragedy of an individual's death in an Islamic way. I analyze social interactions in the face of death, while describing how Muslims wailed for the dead, prepared corpses for burial, marched in funerary processions, and prayed for the deceased. I devote special attention to the "Islamization" of death and society, that is, to the historical process at work during the formative era of Islam, by which early Muslims endeavored to shape death rituals, as well as the social relationships at play, according to an Islamic pattern.[2] Though they sought to imbue persons, objects, and actions with Islamic principles, they often disagreed about just what should count as an "Islamic" form. They waged debates about how rituals should be performed, and by which social actors.[3] Their nominal goal in these debates was to enact funerary laws consistent with the practices of Muḥammad, who also died in Medina in the year 632, and of venerable Muslim ancestors such as Fāṭima. But to the generations that lived a century or two later, it was far from clear how precisely their exemplars had died and what had happened to their bodies between death and burial. Memory itself was contested, and for good reason. At stake was the establishment of a world religion and its influence on social practices.

The oral tradition about Fāṭima's death emerged, for instance, from vibrant discussions with far-reaching implications. Its concern with representing an Islamic, rather than a Jewish or Christian, death is made clear by reference to Fāṭima's desire to die facing in the Muslim direction of prayer. This reference alerts one to the fact that the event, whether or not it happened, had become a meaningful description. Early Islamic thinkers in fact disagreed about the desirability of turning the dying person to face the Ka'ba in Mecca. Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab (d. ca. 712), a Medinese jurist, found the practice offensive for its implication that a Muslim could die in a not-so-Islamic way. Regardless of the orientation of the body at the moment of death, he remarked, "Is not the deceased a Muslim person?"[4] In addition to advocating an Islamic way of dying, the story of Fāṭima's death made two more points. First, it effectively argued that the woman's corpse was ritually pure, even though it had not been washed after death. It would become a point of debate whether or not deceased Muslims were, by definition, impure and therefore in need of ablution. Second, the story included the controversial proposition that Fāṭima's husband was absent during his wife's preparations for burial. A century or so after Fāṭima's death, Muslims began to debate vigorously what role husbands could or could not play in preparing their wives for burial. Those who supported the notion that husbands were entitled to strip naked and wash their dead wives argued that 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Fāṭima's husband, had, on the contrary, undertaken the ritual washing of his wife's corpse.

My principal concern in writing this book has been to show how, in the generations after the deaths of Muḥammad and Fāṭima, Muslims tried to resolve the problem of handling a corpse and to sanction—or transform—everyday urban manners and modes of social interaction. Harking back to the ideal age of the Prophet, they struggled imaginatively over the course of the late seventh, eighth, and early ninth centuries to forge a new and lasting social pattern in the cities of Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the eastern Mediterranean world. The *ahl al-'ilm,* a disparate group of pietists or ideologues, played a key role in this process. Traditionists and jurists, skilled as they were in memorizing or analyzing traditions about Muḥammad, formed most of this group. But it included all men and women recognized, for one or another reason, to possess knowledge of religious matters. Oral traditions, whether of novel or archaic origin, served these pietists to shape the perfect Islamic funeral.

This funeral, as well as the forms of socialization it brought into operation, came to differ significantly from the funerals and social norms of the Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians who inhabited the world of Islam. Through idealized memories of Muḥammad, Fāṭima, and other early converts to Islam, pietists sought to distinguish Islamic from non-Islamic rituals. At the same time, they made a concerted effort to change the way men and women interacted with each other in public and in private. They directed their most innovative laws to those dangerous zones where the male and female spheres of action overlapped.

To study death rites and related beliefs about the afterlife is, in some sense, to study religion at its core. As such, my humanistic, historical labor risks being misinterpreted in the current climate as a polemical or an apologetic work. It is neither. What I offer here are secular, historical interpretations of religious acts and thoughts. Sometimes I dwell on matters, such as the washing of the prophet Muḥammad's corpse, at which delicate readers may blush. Often I turn to controversial issues: for example, the forging of oral traditions and their effect on women's lives. I do so not to call into question Muslim belief in the soundness of any oral tradition, but to show how pietists worked to alter the behavior of women and men. Having grown up in a secular Jewish household in the Catholic city of Puebla, Mexico, I have been fascinated since childhood with the role that religion plays in the formation of social identity. In order to gain an understanding of this role, it seemed to me essential to study death rituals, for they require social action and relate to beliefs about the survival of aspects of the body and soul beyond the moment of death. Death rites have, of course, an ancient origin. We humans have been disposing of the dead with care since Cain murdered his brother, according to the Qur'ān—or for over thirty thousand years, according to paleontologists. This practice, inhumation, precedes the foundation of cities and the origins of agriculture. It stands as one of the oldest activities by which human beings have, at a very basic level, differentiated themselves from other animals. At another level, by caring for the dead in divergent ways, religious communities have over the ages elaborated distinctive cultural and social identities. In light of my personal background, it is easy to explain the motivation driving my research: a desire to understand how and indeed why an emerging monotheistic community developed culturally distinct rituals of death. Muslims knew that the practice of burial in the earth, which they shared with Jews and Christians, originated before the rise of Islam. But the pressing question for them was how to transform this and other common rituals into unique Islamic forms.

Islam, according to one of its great twentieth-century interpreters, “tended to call forth a total social pattern in the name of religion itself.” Muslims interested in the implementation of the *Sharīʻa,* the sacred law of Islam, promoted an exceedingly ambitious program of social reform to guide “the practical policies of a cosmopolitan world.”[5] I see my work as delving into the early Islamic endeavor to reform multiple, yet far from all, aspects of social life at a time when the *Sharīʻa* was still rather fluid, though gradually freezing. *Sharīʻa*-minded pietists had a vested interest not only in upholding the ideal customs of the venerable ancestors (*sunna*), but also in influencing religious observances (*ʻibādāt*), the everyday practices of Muslims (*ʻamal*), their communal relations (*muʻāmalāt*), and their manners of urbane behavior (*adab*). All of these fields were of pressing concern to the ideologues who developed the sacred law of Islam as they set out to craft funerary practices. Yet Islam emerged in a sectarian milieu. In this environment, where Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians had already established distinctive confessional rituals, it became an essential task for Muslim ideologues to enact a funerary form that would signal the divergence of Islamic society from non-Muslim societies. Hence, their funerary laws were driven, in part, by an all-too-human drive to reach social and religious distinction.

Remarkably little scholarship exists on early Islamic death rites. This lack of work is surprising because death has drawn a number of the finest historians of the past few decades, in particular medieval Europeanists practicing social history and *l’histoire des mentalités,* often in dialogue with archaeology and anthropology.[6] Scholars specializing in the study of Islam have written mainly about funerary architecture, inheritance laws, elegiac poetry, the cult of the saints, and eschatological beliefs about Paradise or Hell. Only a handful of articles exist on funerals.[7] As the first social history of death rituals in the early Islamic period, this book seeks to contribute to the history of death, the history of Muslim rituals, and, perhaps most important, to the emerging field of Islamic social history.[8]

Early Islamic traditions concerning the funerals and everyday practices of Muḥammad and his companions promise to provide the building blocks for a new social history. Traditionists, who collected and promoted these traditions, were socially concerned with death rituals, for three reasons. Death appeared to them as a key moment of transition in social life, making it necessary to enact a number of rituals designed ultimately to separate the deceased individual from the community of the living. In addition, funerals often attracted large crowds, and the potential in this context for unruly behavior and emotional outbursts called for the imposition of an Islamic social order. Finally, the rituals ranging from the washing of the corpse in a dark chamber to the interment in the cemetery at the edge of the city required different kinds of social actors to work in public grounds or domestic settings. Such diverse situations provoked fascinating discussions on a wide array of social issues. Traditionists and jurists addressed the right of a caliph to lead the congregation in a funerary prayer, the use of candles in the funerals of the rich, the disposal of non-Muslim corpses, and the precise nature of the relationship between husband and wife at the moment of death. On the basis of such discussions, this history addresses economic and political factors at work in the making of Islamic society, as well as religious and sexual divisions.

Tradition, Law, and Practice

To write this history, I researched various kinds of evidence, ranging from archaeological reports on pre-Islamic burials to theological tracts about the afterlife, and from early Arabic poems of lament to obituaries of famous women and men. I analyzed objects of material culture, shrouds and tombstones in particular, that communicate a very different idea of Islam than do legal sources.[9] I turned to Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian sources, so as to present the rise of Islam in a comparative context. *Vendīdād,* a book of the *Zend-Avesta* that concerns the matter of purity and pollution in relation to human corpses; *Semaḥot,* a minor Talmudic tractate devoted to mourning; and various Eastern Christian canons serve to establish non-Muslim funerary laws and practices. Yet this study relies especially on oral traditions and legal rulings about death rituals.

Collections of sacred law in the genres of *Ḥadīth,* or Oral Tradition, and *Fiqh,* or Jurisprudence, generally include a chapter or book entitled “The Book on Funerary Practice” (*Kitāb al-Janā’iz*). These chapters or books differ from each other in content, focus, and style, although they tend to cover similar topics. Thus, most of these books include a section on burial attire in which they relate a story about the shrouds of Muḥammad. The story itself varies from book to book, as no agreement existed about what garments Muḥammad had worn to the grave. What also tends to vary—sometimes slightly, sometimes significantly—are the conclusions drawn on the basis of an anecdote. In early Islamic sources, differences of opinion often reflected either individual proclivities or local agendas. In funerary traditions, we find evidence mostly for the positions of traditionists from two Arabian cities, Mecca and Medina, and two Mesopotamian cities, Kūfa and

Baṣra. Other important cities of the early Islamic world, such as Ṣan‘ā’, Damascus, Ḥimṣ (Homs), and Fusṭāṭ, are not as well represented. In postclassical sources, differences of opinion tend to follow institutionalized divisions based on the teachings of a school of law or a sect. Islam became divided into three major branches—the Sunni, the Shī‘ite, and the Khārijite—with each branch undergoing further division. Thus, we have four major Sunni schools of law (Mālikites, Ḥanafites, Shāfi‘ites, and Ḥanbalites), three main Shī‘ite sects (Zaydis, Ismā‘īlis, and Twelvers), and three main Khārijite sects (though only the Ibāḍis matter for our purposes).

The two genres of *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh* were closely interrelated, particularly in the earliest writings. Technically speaking, a work in the first genre should be simply a repository of oral traditions, whereas a work in the second genre should consist of disciplined judgments issued in relation to oral traditions, Qur’ānic dicta, and local practices. It is not entirely clear, however, how to categorize the *Muwaṭṭa’* of Malik ibn Anas (d. 795). It contains traditions and legal rulings, but should not count as an interdisciplinary work, for it was dictated before the lines between the two genres were clearly drawn. The lines would remain blurry even in the ninth century. Collectors of traditions tended to select sayings with a prescriptive eye, often grouping them under subheadings that reflected their own legal interpretations. Jurists, for their part, frequently issued laws that derived directly from traditions, without bothering to explain the hermeneutics in play.

To interpret oral traditions for the purposes of historical reconstruction presents a special and exciting challenge. The sources are prescriptive in nature, making it difficult to measure the distance between religious ideal and mundane reality; they tend, furthermore, to defy the historicist goal of determining time and place of origin. Only in rare cases can historians agree on the dating of an oral tradition: apocalyptic traditions “predicting” events with a high degree of specificity obviously originated at some point after the actual events. Most often, however, it is impossible to localize traditions with precision in time and space.[10]

Most traditions about Muḥammad’s works and sayings emerged at some point between the early seventh century, during the Prophet’s lifetime, and the late ninth century. Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), al-Bukhārī (d. 870), Muslim (d. 875), Ibn Māja (d. 887), Abū Dā’ūd (d. 889), and al-Tirmidhī (d. 892) transcribed thousands of oral traditions in standard, eventually canonized, collections. There exist also earlier works that contain oral traditions. Attributed to Zayd ibn ‘Alī (d. 740), Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), al-Rabī‘ ibn Ḥabīb (d. ca. 790), Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795), Abū Ghānim Bishr (d. ca. 815), and ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 827), these works are of great importance to historians of the making of Islam. The bulk of traditions in these collections circulated orally before they were written down. Focusing on early collections and researching in a technical way the formal processes by which oral traditions were transmitted from one or a few to several authorities, source critics have recently been favoring the late seventh and early eighth centuries as the most significant period in the movement toward memorialization. They have tried to establish that in many cases Muslims genuinely transmitted traditions dating from this period, if not from an earlier time, while acknowledging that over the course of the eighth century Muslims sometimes invented or embellished oral traditions.[11] Still, we continue to face a gap of several generations between the lifetime of Muḥammad and the period when the formal transmission of oral traditions began. It is one thing to offer a plausible history of the transmission of an anecdote from the late seventh to the early ninth century, and quite another thing to establish its historicity. Frequently, we cannot know with certainty whether an oral tradition reflects a real event from early seventh-century Medina, for example, or a forgery originating in eighth-century Baṣra. Historians dealing with the *ḥadīth* must always be aware of the possibility of deliberate ascription and purposeful misrepresentation. In fairly obvious cases, we can ascertain bias in a tradition and discount it as spurious. In other cases, we have no grounds on which to consider a tradition as genuine simply because we find no reason to suspect it. Traditions were forged for reasons unknown.[12]

Due to the time gap between alleged event and written commemoration, and due to the fact that oral traditions often contradict one another, historians of early Islam have questioned the reliability of these sources and their worth in historical inquiry. Scholars have approached the Oral Tradition with markedly different attitudes, ranging from apologetic defensiveness to secular irreverence. They have developed distinct methodological approaches, sharpened by debates held during the past three decades.[13] Instead of summarizing the contributions of individual scholars from various camps, I should like to highlight the tendencies that help to clarify my own perspective. An empirically minded skeptical revisionist has argued that “the components of the Islamic tradition are secondary constructions, the history of which we are not invited to pursue: they simply have to be discarded.” History should be based not on traditions of uncertain historicity but on harder facts: coins and monumental inscriptions that offer material and datable evidence, external documents that attest to the formation of Islam without the kind of bias inherent in internal Muslim accounts, and forged traditions that originated outside of Arabia. On this basis, skeptical revisionists have written histories that bear little resemblance to early Muslim narratives of the origins of

Islam and diverge deliberately from mildly skeptical accounts.[14] I have benefited from many of their methodological insights, yet I differ from them by my efforts to relate oral traditions of indeterminable historicity to a historical process that unfolded in both Arabia and Mesopotamia.

Another alternative to the approach of skeptical empiricists presents history not as a discipline based exclusively on verifiable events but as a “gamble on probabilities,” the object of which is to select judiciously “those reports that seemed most reliable” due to their apparent lack of political or theological bias. The historian interpreting sources from this perspective tends to dismiss legendary stories and to recast polemical material. By no means does he simply reproduce the traditional narrative of the rise of an Islamic polity. Instead, he reassesses disputes and grievances over succession to the caliphate. He rehabilitates certain leaders and illustrates with colorful anecdotes their appeal and their power. A work of history written from this angle often seems persuasive.[15] But it fails to heed the lessons of skeptical empiricism by constructing a narrative of “events” that might never have occurred on the basis of traditions that may contain undetected biases.

Moving beyond this approach, with its relatively straightforward dichotomy between fact and fiction, literary-minded scholars have written about the idealization of the life of Muḥammad and of his wife ‘Ā’isha, and about the fictionalization of certain events, such as the plague pandemic of 541 to 749. There is in this scholarship, loosely affiliated with the critical aims of new historicism or cultural poetics, no elusive search for that kernel of historical truth supposedly hidden in legendary texts. The aim is to read texts, including oral traditions, as literary products of early Islamic culture. With this perspective comes a shift away from the questions, so beloved by source critics, about the origins and authenticity of the Muslim tradition.[16] Adopting this perspective, historians can begin to focus not on the obscure origins of an oral tradition but on its destination. This can be determined because an oral tradition consists of two parts: a report on an ancient event normally accompanied by a saying of Muḥammad’s (*matn*) and a chain of authorities lending support to the oral transmission from generation to generation (*isnād*). On the basis of this account of oral transmission, researchers can establish with fair confidence the local context where a cluster of traditions about a specific topic circulated.[17] In this way, one can sometimes discover that it was principally traditionists from one particular region who related a certain story about an act of Muḥammad’s. Such a discovery will shed light neither on the purported event nor on the first instance when the story was told. But it will show where, eventually, a group of individuals commemorated the story, and thus give insight into the geography of social practice.

While building on this scholarship, this book takes a new path, by concentrating on the ideological agenda of the transmitters who advocated oral traditions and on the relevance of their remembrances within a particular environment. It rarely matters, from the perspective of a historian of culture and society, whether a collective memory of Muḥammad's age was sound or contrived. What is important, I would argue, is to reach an understanding of the social function of this memory within a society experiencing rapid change. Accordingly, the title of this work, *Muhammad's Grave,* refers not literally to the Prophet's sepulcher in Medina, but metaphorically to the very concrete ways by which the remembrance of Muḥammad affected the practices of Muslims after his death. Oral traditions about his death and burial played a special role in Muslim societies long after 632. These traditions, which represented rituals mimetically and with a high degree of realism, corresponded to the ritual actions that Muslims, who had an affinity for memories of Muḥammad, repeatedly performed. They served either to reinforce practices that resembled closely an ideal ritual form or to criticize those that did not.[18] One way or the other, these traditions formed part of an ideological discourse on everyday life. As such, they reflect the *mentalité* of traditionists and reveal, though imperfectly, their social and cultural milieu.

This position does not imply any simple correspondence between the actual rituals of the traditionist milieu and the rituals depicted in the Oral Tradition. The rituals traditionists observed or participated in had an influence on the oral traditions they transmitted. They tended to select, and frequently to relate, traditions that had some bearing on their local practices, and surely in certain cases some of them succumbed to the temptation to remember—really, to imagine—a ritual from the age of Muḥammad that resonated with their present concerns. At the same time, we should be aware of the force of these traditions once they became accepted as authoritative. Insofar as pietists managed to persuade Muslims to follow their directives, these traditions had a certain social effect and cultural impact. That said, it is in most cases impossible to measure when, where, and precisely how an oral tradition affected ritual practice.[19]

The relationship between ideal and practice was thus complex. Yet several historians of gender and of Islamic law have portrayed it in rather narrow terms. Positing too extensive a separation between discourse and practice, they have called into question, by implication if not deliberately, the very possibility of writing on the basis of legal literature a social history in which gender figures as a key category of analysis. "Islamic law did not grow out of practice," argued an expert on the origins of Islamic jurisprudence, "it came into being as the expression of a religious ideal in opposition to it."[20] Perhaps under the influence of this formulation, a historian of gender warned against the use of the sacred law of Islam for the purposes of social history: “Islamic literature” does not offer “a descriptive account of how things happened.” “Essentially prescriptive in nature,” it reflects “the normative gender system that existed in the minds of an urban male educated elite, not the lived experiences of men as men and women as women.” Historians ought to handle these sources “as a form of discourse about gender that reveals vested interest rather than records actual practice.” “Most historians now agree,” she concluded, “that the study of these texts should not be confused with the study of historical society.”[21]

Early Islamic funerary law was, of course, prescriptive, and it includes many rules against practices that traditionists despised, such as wailing for the dead and inscribing tombstones. Laws of this kind did not come into being in a mental vacuum—they arose in opposition to underlying practices. Jurists alongside traditionists decried novel practices and celebrated ancestral ones, revealing in the process much about the usages of Muslims. Jurists also worked to accommodate local customs that emerged outside of Arabia and became issues of legal concern after Muḥammad’s death. Frequently, their aim was to describe in elaborate and chilling detail how to conduct a certain ritual, whether of Arabian origin or not: how to squeeze a corpse’s bowels, for example, or how to braid a corpse’s hair. By and large, laws of this kind were intended as practical instructions for actual use. Thus we should describe Islamic funerary law as partly “adaptive” and partly “reactive.” Adaptive and reactive laws that derived from close observation of ritual practices must count as socially descriptive despite their legally prescriptive quality.

The Oral Tradition, for the most part transcribed and censored by men, does contain sayings demeaning women.[22] This fact has influenced historians of gender in their evaluation of the genre. In this discourse, they have argued, women tend to appear as distant reflections of historical personages because male authors reconstructed women’s lives and sayings in multiple, often contradictory representations.[23] There is, however, little justification for viewing the Oral Tradition as a male discourse far removed from the experiences of women. Men compiled the books of Oral Tradition, to be sure, yet many of the transmitters of oral traditions were actually women.[24] In addition, men indirectly reported women’s words and their works, even if in a negative light. We must learn to read against the grain, so that the early Islamic world will not appear as if populated exclusively by legal-minded men. Impoverished widows, wailers for the dead, shroud weavers, gravediggers, and corpse washers all participated in the making of early Islamic society, though they obviously did less than traditionists and jurists to shape the discourse. The funerary traditions examined in this book will reveal, more than the imaginary world of lawmakers, quotidian realities.

The legal sources reflect the viewpoint of townsmen—not of nomads, holy warriors, or rural people who died outside of the Islamic *oecumene.* This concentration on urban life offers an advantage. It helps highlight how the process of Islamic socialization unfolded differently in different cities. A focus on cities enables this book to convey how the civilization of Islam changed as its center of gravity shifted away from Mecca and Medina, the Prophet's cities in Arabia, to the booming garrison cities established by the Arab conquerors in Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean world.

In the early Islamic world, as elsewhere, different facets of human existence succumbed to change at different times and according to different rhythms. Transformations in public and in private rituals did not coincide. Some things changed not at all or imperceptibly. Though traditionists were surprisingly realistic in their goals, they sometimes failed to achieve them, as will become clear once we turn to their attempt to convert the emotions of women to an Islamic standard. Still, this book shows that significant changes in the process of Islamicizing death occurred during the long eighth century, with the period between the last decade of the seventh century and the third decade of the eighth century forming a great watershed.

But the turning points in this process varied geographically. Arguing against jurists who supported the practices of their own cities, the jurist Mālik apparently advocated the current practice of his city, Medina, as if it preserved the ideal tradition revealed by God's Messenger to the first community of Muslims.[25] We cannot be sure of this presumption of continuity. Medina, like Mecca, experienced social and economic upheaval as a result of the Arab conquests and the triumph of Islam. But it is easy to understand why pietists from the cities of Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean world often visited the cities of Muḥammad in Arabia, where they hoped to discover the true Islamic form. Yet they might have paid closer attention to exciting developments back home. For it was in the new garrison cities, particularly in Baṣra and Kūfa, that profound ritual—and consequently social—transformation first occurred. These cities gathered a mixed population of Arabian immigrants, including retired conquerors with their mothers and wives, new converts, and Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians seeking opportunity in the new centers of power. Here one could sense the vigor and exuberance, even a certain nervous agitation, that accompanied the mingling of populations in an era of religious change. Islam was then but a young religion. Its civilizing mission still unfinished, the pietists from Baṣra and Kūfa were most anxious for its realization.[26]

Each chapter of this history explores a different layer of human interaction, ranging from family relations around the deathbed to imaginary relationships between dreamers and the dead. The generous reader who will exercise his or her imagination may come to see a society in motion—first in domestic settings and on public grounds, ultimately in imaginary spaces. The pungent smell of camphor rising from the corpse of a Medinese wife; the vengeful, piercing sound of women lamenting a warrior's death; the sight of wild-haired angels prying a man's soul out of his toenails—all of these are glimpses of the distant world I have endeavored to resurrect. May it come to life now.

CHAPTER ONE

Tombstones

Markers of Social and Religious Change, 650–800

Twenty or so years after the death of the prophet Muḥammad in 632, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr passed away. His name does not appear in the annals of history and, but for an extraordinary record of his death, memory of his existence would have been altogether lost. His tombstone, once hailed as “the oldest known monument in the Islamic world,” entreats the reader to ask for God’s forgiveness:

> In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, this grave belongs to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr al-Ḥajrī.
> Forgive him, O God, and make him enter [Paradise] by your mercy, and let us go with him.
> Seek forgiveness for him whenever this inscription is read, and say “Amen!”
> This inscription was written in Jumādā II of the year 31 [January or February of the year 652 CE].[1]

One overly enthusiastic skeptic has questioned the antiquity of this tombstone by suggesting—mistakenly—that “even if the date intended were 131 AH, it would still be the earliest tombstone in Arabic.”[2] Actually, several tombstones bear dates prior to 131 AH (749 CE), and there is no good reason to doubt the date of 31 AH, written in stone.[3] The important objection to consider concerns not the date of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s tombstone, but its categorization as an “Islamic” monument. If the objective is to say something meaningful about the making of Islam, we must wonder how justifiable it is to label this tombstone “Islamic.” It refers to Allāh explicitly and to the Hijrī calendar implicitly, but contains no reference to the prophet Muḥammad and no allusion to Muslim scripture. It records the death of a believer in Allah, but otherwise lacks a distinctively Islamic identity. Its plea for divine forgiveness in the afterlife was commonplace in Jewish and Christian tombstones from late antiquity, and it is by no means clear that the inscriber's intention was to produce a uniquely Islamic—rather than, more generally, a monotheistic—memorial.[4]

Islamic markers, such as prayers for the prophet Muḥammad and quotations from the Qur'ān, emerged in epitaphs in the period between 690 and 720, and it was only by the 790s, as this chapter will show, that a formulaic pattern became established, including a standardized confession of faith. These changes in the tombstone record reflect a gradual process of Islamization. To witness such a process unfolding is an exciting matter for a historian, especially due to the scarcity of datable documents from the first two centuries of the Islamic era. This process of religious change, though widely rooted, became controversial in some circles. Upholders of tradition, pietistic ideologues from the eighth century, began actively to oppose the popular practice of inscribing tombstones. Despite the fact that the epitaphs contained pious religious sentiments, traditionists decried the practice as a blameworthy innovation that violated the customs of Medina, the city in Arabia where God had revealed the new religion to the prophet Muḥammad.

In this chapter, changes in the tombstone record from the first two centuries of Islam will be examined alongside the traditionist literature directed against tombstones. Analyzing this record, which historians of early Islam have largely overlooked, is in and of itself worthwhile for several reasons.[5] First, tombstones hint at the changing role of the Qur'ān in the religion of early Islam. Qur'ānic quotations are first attested on tombstone inscriptions from the first quarter of the eighth century; by the end of that century, tombstones begin to display fairly elaborate quotations. They reveal a facet of an emerging ritual, that of reciting scripture in a ceremony of intercession for the dead. This is a practice about which early Islamic literature has remarkably little to say. Given how limited our knowledge is about the emergence of a Qur'ānic liturgy in the formative period of Islam, this documentary evidence is significant.

Second, dated tombstone inscriptions provide an independent record of religious trends, suggesting an alternative standard for periodization to the chronology followed by historians of the early Islamic polity. In the context of political narrative, it makes sense to adopt the year 750, when the ‘Abbasids overthrew the Marwanid dynasty from power, as a revolutionary turning point. But this date has no significance in the tombstone record, which suggests that key changes in the practice of Islam occurred at other times, irrespectively of political developments, around the years 691, 721, and 795. Before proceeding with this alternative chronology, a caveat on the limitations of the evidence must be considered. Dated tombstone inscriptions from this early period come primarily from the lands of Egypt. In recent years, epigraphists have begun collecting inscriptions from various other sites in the eastern Mediterranean world and from the Arabian peninsula, but so far, most of their discoveries date from a later period, beginning circa 850.[6] As a result, the tombstones to be analyzed reflect primarily changes in the practice of Islam in early Islamic Egypt. In this connection, it is also worth stating the obvious: this history is based on tombstones already discovered. New discoveries may alter in ways minor or significant the chronology to be developed below.

Beyond these two contributions, an examination of the epitaphs in conjunction with the relevant traditionist literature will offer the opportunity to see how traditionists reacted to an emerging popular practice. It could be argued that tombstones and tombstone inscriptions, if prohibitively expensive for the poor and relatively incomprehensible to the illiterate, were part of elite rather than of popular practice. But “popular” in this chapter simply refers to practices that were relatively widespread in social and geographic terms. Traditionists did not uniformly oppose such practices; they readily approved of usages that followed or seemed to follow their prescriptions. Yet they despised any deviation from the customs they sanctioned and, in the name of tradition, decried new practices as contemptible innovations. Accordingly, the focus at the end of this chapter will be on the emergence of a productive tension between traditionism and a popular Muslim practice. This tension led not only to the development of the reactive mentality that came in part to characterize traditionist Islam, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to the formation of an alternative religiosity.[7]

Commemorating the Muslim Fathers

Before proceeding with the process of Islamization as it unfolded in view of dated epitaphs, let us first characterize early Muslim tombstones in light of non-Muslim ones. This examination will serve to highlight a significant social transition toward the commemoration of individuals and their paternal kin. Seventh-and eighth-century Muslims rarely emerge from their tombstones with an individual profile. We learn from these documents the name of a certain Muslim, his or her sex and parentage, and often, the date of death. Occasionally, we can determine the social and economic status of the deceased, when his or her “last name” (i.e., *nisba*) denotes a professional occupation. But the essential questions that might occur to us about the age reached before death and the cause of death, the main accomplishments of the person, surviving spouses or children, desires fulfilled or unfulfilled, are typically left unanswered, as in ʻAbd al-Raḥmān's tombstone. Sometimes, a medieval tombstone will boast a geometric design, witticism, or charming poem.[8] By contrast, the earliest Islamic tombstones express a religion both austere and iconoclastic. Principally, what Muslims cared to commemorate in these monuments was their own personal, confessional affiliation to Islam.

In terms of kinship, early Muslim tombstones record patrilineal descent. We learn the names of fathers, grandfathers, and even great-grandfathers—rarely do we learn of mothers, grandmothers, or other relations.[9] The seventh-century tombstone of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr displays only one patrilineal link. (*Ibn* means "son of.") Late eighth-century tombstones frequently memorialize three and even four generations of male links, as in the cases of Rabīʻa ibn Maslama ibn Ḥunāṭa al-Ṣadafī (d. 795) and of Ibrāhīm ibn Hishām ibn Bakr ibn Abī ʻUthmān (d. *799).*[10] By emphasizing paternal descent to such a degree, early Muslims distinguished themselves from Jews, from Christians, and from pre-Islamic Arabs.

To illustrate the significance of this commemoration of male ancestors, let us examine selectively several non-Muslim tombstones, beginning with the epitaphs of three Jews who died before the rise of Islam. The tombstone of Arsinoé, a Hellenized Jewish woman, identifies her as the daughter of Theodosios, yet also records that she died at age twenty, that she married, and that she left no descendants. Theophila commissioned the epitaph of her husband, Dosas, dead at age eighteen. The tombstone of Machaon, son of Sabbathaios, tells us the boy died at age five, and that his mother, Philoumene, has become depressed.[11] All three monuments memorialize various kinds of family ties, stressing bonds between husband and wife, father and daughter, or mother and son.

Christian Coptic tombstones similarly display ties to various members of the family, not only to fathers. We learn that Troisis, who died in the year 741, was the wife of Parashe. (The epitaph does not mention her father's name.) Another eighth-century tombstone laments death in bitter terms for severing fathers from their children. It continues:

> Let all who love to weep for their dead come to this place and mourn greatly on account of the wretchedness of my childhood.
> I Ioḥannes the deacon passed through it when my mother was a widow. I went to the city of Kōs. I died in that place, and they laid me in this tomb.

Remember me.

And the monks, as one can only expect, tended to commemorate ties to their brothers.[12]

Was emphasis on male ancestors the norm in pre-Islamic Arab societies? Did the early Muslims import this Arabian sense of kinship to the lands they conquered? The answer to these questions cannot be a simple yes or no. A marked cleavage is easily noticeable, however, when pre-Islamic and early Islamic tombstones are compared. There are a few striking pre-Islamic examples. First, a recently discovered South Arabian tombstone (a Hasaean inscription from Thāj) commemorates a matrilineal line! There is no mention of a male ancestor as it traces the descent of Ghadhiyat, daughter of Malkat, daughter of Shabām, daughter of Aḥidat.[13] Though this was not the pre-Islamic norm, the exception is significant.

Consider, in the second place, the tomb of ‘Ijl bin Haf‘am, which a team of Saudi archaeologists recently brought to light. The nobleman's tomb asks for the protection of various deities, which is unremarkable. What is striking, in light of the fact that Muslim tombstones would designate single occupancy, is that this one claims possession of the grave not just for ‘Ijl, but also for his brother, sons, grandsons, and wives.[14] In sum, this was an extended family grave. The familial, as opposed to the individualistic, element was emphasized also in pre-Islamic Syriac inscriptions and funerary mosaics from Edessa and environs.[15]

Even more remarkable is the daughters' tomb at Mada'in Salih, a Nabataean outpost in western Arabia. Wushūḥ, the daughter of Bagrat, and her daughters Qaynū and Nashkūyah built a tomb for themselves, as well as for another set of Wushūḥ's daughters, ‘Amīrat, ‘Uṣra'nat, and Al‘alat. It is not clear why the daughters were divided into two groups. Perhaps the first two daughters helped pay for the monument, while the remaining three were too poor or too young to participate in this manner. Alternatively, the two sets of daughters may have had different fathers, a possibility that cannot be determined, because the memorial mentions only their mother's name. This, then, serves as an example of a tomb designed for an Arab matriarch and her five daughters.[16] By contrast, all early Islamic tombstones were designed for individuals who invariably identified themselves either as a father's son or daughter.

These pre-Islamic tombstones call into question an argument made by experts on Muslim laws of inheritance. They have assumed that "the tribal society of pre-Islamic Arabia" emphasized male relationships, rather than uterine kinship, and that the "pre-Islamic custom in Arabia restricted inheritance to … male relatives of the deceased who were related only through male links."[17] Ghadhiyat emphasized uterine kinship, however, and Wushūḥ apparently restricted her inheritance to female relatives. Evidently, pre-Islamic Arab societies were not all of them as patriarchal as one might imagine.

Arguably, if Islam had remained an Arabian phenomenon, the tombstones of Muslims might have displayed a sense of kinship less sharply distinguishable from the pre-Islamic Arabian varieties. Occasionally, at least, Muslim women of Hasaean or Nabatean background might have traced their lineage to their mothers. So how did it occur that early Muslim tombstones came to commemorate exclusively ties to male progenitors? Presumably, the definitive change in the idealization of kinship bonds happened as a result of the Arab conquests. Indeed, with few exceptions, the seventh-and eighth-century tombstones of Muslims record Arab parentage. Perhaps in this way the grandsons and granddaughters of the first Muslims celebrated descent from the triumphant Arab conquerors. However, this explanation for the Arab-Muslim commemoration of the grandfathers may be too simple, as it fails to consider non-Arab converts to Islam of Jewish or Christian background. Why did they not underscore family ties to mothers or to surviving wives and husbands? This question can only be answered in a speculative form. Perhaps conversion to Islam implied, more than a confession of faith, a shift in social orientation toward a postconquests culture dominated by patriarchal ideals.

The Process of Islamization

Having considered the social aspect of the process of Islamization in relation to tombstones, let us turn now to the religious aspect. The tombstone of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr, who died in the year 652, displayed no distinctively Islamic formulas. Four decades after his death, an Egyptian monument commemorating the death of ʿAbbāsa bint Jurayj in 691 (71 AH) begins to show Islamic signs.

> In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the greatest of misfortunes for the people of Islam [*ahl al-Islām*] is their loss [*muṣība*] of the prophet Muḥammad. May God pray for him and grant him salvation.
>
> This is the tomb of ʿAbbāsa, the daughter of Jurayj, the son of Sanad, may the mercy of God, his forgiveness [*maghfira*] and good will be upon her.
>
> She died on Monday, with fourteen days having passed of Dhū al-Qaʿda, of the year Seventy One [April 21, 691 CE], while

> confessing [*wa-hiya tashhadu*] there is no God but Allah, alone, having no partner, and that Muḥammad is his slave and messenger.
>
> May God pray for him and grant him salvation.[18]

This inscription of the Muslim daughter of Jurayj, or Little George, a man likely of Christian Coptic roots, is recognizably Islamic. At the closing we have an unequivocal confession of faith. The lament over the death of Muḥammad as a calamity (*muṣība*) has a distinctive elegiac quality, characteristic of Arab mourning. The most striking element is the reference to the Muslim peoples as a “family” (*ahl),* perhaps understood as a branch of the *ahl al-kitāb,* the people to whom a sacred text had been revealed. *Ahl al-Islām* is not a generic designation, in the way “Muslims” is. It also lacks the political overtones of *umma,* or community. At work was a different, perhaps more intimate type of communal identity. While retaining a formal tie to her father, who may well have paid for her tombstone, this Muslim daughter also developed a sense of kinship with the greater family of Muslims. They mourned at her graveside the death of the prophet Muḥammad as if it had happened yesterday, though two generations had passed.

There may have been other commemorative stones much like ‘Abbāsa’s, but these did not survive the vicissitudes of time. ‘Abbāsa’s tombstone is a unique historical document. It expresses eloquently—perhaps more eloquently than any other datable record from the material culture of the first century of Islam—an individual’s sense of communal identity, from a unique nongovernmental perspective and in an age for which we possess precious little evidence. One may suggest, on the basis of the scant evidence available, that a fundamental transformation occurred over the course of four decades of the seventh century, between the deaths of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān in 652 and of ‘Abbāsa in 691. This transformation culminated in the development of a self-conscious articulation of Muslim communal identity, realized by a rather complex operation. ‘Abbāsa’s tombstone seeks to induce in us a mournful response to the death of the prophet Muḥammad and to persuade the reader who considers himself or herself part of the family of Islam to plead for God’s forgiveness on behalf of a Muslim daughter.[19]

‘Abbāsa’s epitaph is in many ways exceptional. It differs significantly not only from earlier tombstones, as we have seen, but also from later ones. Certain of its phrases would become formulaic: the *basmala,* an invocation of God, and the *shahāda,* a testimony of the Muslim creed. The lament over the loss of Muḥammad would also appear with some frequency in subsequent tombstones.[20] Yet ‘Abbāsa’s tombstone lacks one important element characteristic of eighth-century commemorative monuments: a quotation from the Qur’ān.

Qur’ānic citations are a key marker of the process of Islamization. Quotations of this kind became commonplace in epitaphs of the late eighth century and thereafter. It is striking, however, that not a single one of the handful of dated tombstone inscriptions from the first century of Islam boasts a Quotation From the Qur’ān. The earliest citation discovered belongs to Fāṭima bint al-Ḥasan’s tombstone, who died in 721 (102 AH) and affirmed the sovereignty (*mulk*) and omnipotence of God (*huwa ‘alā kull shay’ qadīr*) precisely according to the formula in Qur’ān 67:1.[21] (See fig. 1.1.) Another one of the earliest citations affirmed the oneness of God, in a tombstone of 729 (111 AH), precisely according to the formula in the Qur’ān’s *Sūra* 112.[22]

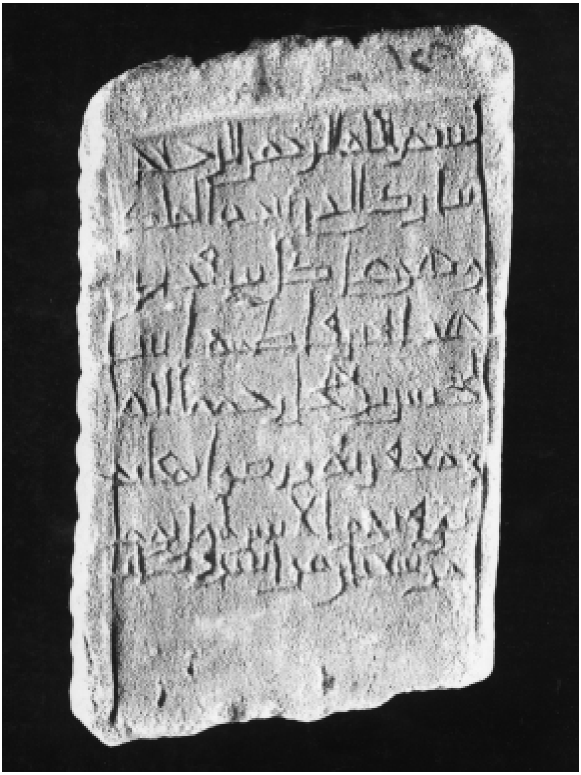

Figure 1.1 The tombstone of Fāṭima bint al-Ḥasan (d. 102 AH/721 CE), an austere sandstone monument celebrating God’s power, with a Qur’ānic quotation from *Sūrat al-Mulk.* Source: ‘Abd al-Raḥman M. ‘Abd al-Tawab, *Stèles islamiques de la nécropole d’Assouan* (1977). Photo by courtesy of J.-F. Gout © Institut français d’archéologie orientale. Reproduced with permission.

It is worth pausing a moment to consider this evidence in light of the scholarly debate on the canonization of the Qur'ān. According to an expert on inscriptions of the Negev, the first instances of Qur'ānic paraphrases arrived on the scene in the late eighth century. The "language of the Umayyad inscriptions is patently" non-Qur'ānic, he affirmed, and he endeavored on this basis to corroborate John Wansbrough's arguments about the canonization of the Qur'ān in 'Abbasid times, that is, around the turn of the ninth century.[23] Unfortunately, these bold statements, applicable though they might be to the Negev inscriptions, fail to take into consideration the material cited here.

Wansbrough had speculated that Qur'ānic *logia,* discrete statements disjoint from narrative, originated in a multiplicity of communities and regions. They served a polemical and a liturgical function, in his view, before they were somehow gathered and canonized in a text "reflecting polygenesis rather than diffusion through historical contact." Muslim scripture, he argued provocatively, betrays a gradual process of canonization that must have taken several generations. Specifically, he proposed that Qur'ānic canonization occurred due to interconfessional polemics extending to the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth century.[24]

Precise Qur'ānic quotations on eighth-century tombstones call into question Wansbrough's chronology as well as his theory about polygenesis. The tombstones of 721 and 729 were both discovered in the cemetery of Aswan, a city by the Nile River in southern Egypt. They include long phrases that correspond in strings of over ten words precisely to verses in the standard text of the Qur'ān, known as the 'Uthmānic codex. We may suspect for this reason that a copy of this book—or an alternative scripture that resembled it exactly in the verses in question—had reached southern Egypt by the third decade of the eighth century. Perhaps, however, these long phrases were not direct quotations from Muslim scripture, but stock sayings or formulaic phrases that derived from the Qur'ān but circulated orally before the arrival of the book in Aswan. Allegiance to Wansbrough's chronology might produce the further contention that such sayings and phrases, though eventually integrated into the Qur'ān, might first have gained currency before the emergence of a deliberate, sophisticated, final edition. This scenario would appear not unlikely if accompanied by a plausible explanation about their point of origin and the mechanism for their dispersal. One could argue, for instance, that beginning in the 690s the Marwanid caliphate began promoting, through coins and monumental inscriptions, certain dogmas in a highly formulaic language, and that these official dogmas gradually spread throughout the realm until by the 720s they emerged in provincial epitaphs. But this explanation in favor of Marwanid dissemination contradicts the theory of polygenesis in its application to the eighth century. In addition, a likely point of origin for these Marwanid dogmas would be the Qur'ān, whether in the form of the so-called 'Uthmānic codex or not. Accordingly, geographically widespread "quotations" from the Qur'ān on eighth-century tombstones appear indicative of a process of scriptural diffusion, not of polygenesis. Alternatively, because scattered verses cannot alone prove the existence of an entire book identical in form and structure to the standard text of the Qur'ān, we might refer to the diffusion of Qur'ānic *logia* without making assumptions about their derivation from an invariable, canonized text. One way or the other, the presence in the tombstones of the 720s of Qur'ānic or proto-Qur'ānic forms provides concrete evidence of the process of Islamization at work in a remote, provincial location.

As tombstones provide only isolated Qur'ānic verses, they do not reveal anything about the collection of the standard text in the so-called 'Uthmānic codex. They do, however, serve to illustrate when verses that are exactly the same as verses in this authoritative text, whose prehistory is a matter of speculation, became established in various regions throughout the Islamic world. In this context, it is worth examining not only precise Qur'ānic "quotations" in epitaphs, but also paraphrases or variants.[25] Occasionally, inscriptions from the end of the first century of Islam contain material that sounds Qur'ānic but does not conform to the standard text. Thus, for instance, the graffito of 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Ubayd, which dates from 92 AH (710 CE), reads: "Pardon his [cumulative] sin, the preceding and the forth-coming parts of it." This plea corresponds closely to a Qur'ānic formulation, but not exactly.[26] Unfortunately, in this as in most such cases, it is impossible to determine whether 'Abd al-Malik was paraphrasing the 'Uthmānic text or quoting precisely from a non-'Uthmānic version.[27] Early Islamic epitaphs from the environs of 'Asham, an Arabian village in Tihāma on the trade and pilgrimage route between the Ḥijāz and the Yemen, insert the Prophet's name, "Muḥammad," into what is otherwise a precise quotation of Qur'ān 33:56. Significantly, a later quotation of this verse from the same region, deriving from the late eighth or early ninth century, omits the Prophet's name, as if in order to conform to the 'Uthmānic version.[28] By concentrating on such minor changes, we gain some insight into an important process: the dissemination of canonical verses from one or another recension of the Qur'ān to multiple locations ranging from Aswān to 'Asham. This process, the epitaphs indicate, began no later than the third decade of the eighth century and continued in force for several decades afterward.

Epitaphs with Qur'ānic verses serve also to illustrate a neglected issue in Qur'ānic studies: the changing role of Muslim scripture in everyday rituals. They can illustrate this role in a unique way because these epitaphs, unlike coins with quotations from the Qur’ān, belong to a special field of ritual activity, the cemetery, and because they contain prayers for the dead. By the late eighth century, the Qur’ān would play a key role in acts of devotion toward the dead. To appreciate this role and to gain further insight into the process of Islamization that unfolded over the course of the second century of the Islamic era, let us turn to a typical epitaph from the end of the eighth century. Rabīʿa ibn Maslama’s tombstone from the year 795 (179 AH) resembles many ninth-century epitaphs in that it quotes two popular Qur’ānic verses. Yet it differs significantly from the tombstone of ʻAbbāsa, who had died about a century before Rabīʿa.

> In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, this is what Rabīʿa ibn Maslama ibn Ḥunāṭa al-Ṣadafī testified.
>
> He confessed [*yashhadu*] that there is no God but Allah Alone, who has no partner, and that Muḥammad is his slave and messenger.
>
> He sent him “with guidance and right judgment in order to triumph over all of religion [*li-yuẓhirahu ʻala `l-dīn kullihi*], though the idolaters deny it” [cf. Qur’ān 9:33].
>
> [And he confessed] that the Garden is real and the Fire is real, “and that the Hour [of Judgment] is coming, no doubt about it, and that God will resurrect those who are in the graves” [cf. Qur’ān 22:7].
>
> He believed in God’s omnipotence [*al-qadar*]—all of it, the good and the evil. According to it he lived and according to it he died, and according to it he will be resurrected alive, God willing.
>
> O God, insinuate to him his proof [*laqqinhu ḥujjatahu],* and fill his grave with light [*nawwir ʻalayhi qabrahu*]. And may the abode of your pleasure be recognized between him and his Prophet.
>
> [May] the mercies [*raḥamāt*] of God [be] upon him, and his forgiveness [*maghfira*] and satisfaction. He passed away on Sunday, with six nights left to Muḥarram of the Year 179 [April 19, 795 CE].[29]

This particular inscription, though conventional or ordinary, is an apt representative of the emerging pattern. It includes quotations from two of the most favored verses in ninth-century Egyptian epitaphs, 9:33 and 22:7.[30] The relevance of verse 22:7 is immediately evident: unsurprisingly, it confirms Rabīʿa ibn Maslama’s faith in the resurrection of the body at the last hour. The significance of verse 9:33

is more difficult to unravel. In the view of early Islamic exegetes, the verse celebrated the inexorable triumph of Islam over other religious communities (*milal*); the historical rivalry between Islam and Christianity played a prominent role in apocalyptic interpretations of it.[31]

Why was this verse relevant in the Egypt of the late eighth and ninth centuries, given that the land had been conquered in the seventh century? Perhaps its celebration of the triumph of Islam over other religions coincided with a period of mass conversions to the religion in power. Alternatively, given that many of these tombstones boasted an Arab lineage, authentic or acquired, perhaps they celebrated instead the historical triumph of Muslims of Arab origin in a land where a high proportion of the population (surely still the majority) had not yet converted from Coptic Christianity to Islam.[32]

In the tenth century, verses 9:33 and 22:7 do not fall out of favor, but they do decline drastically in popularity as a new trend arises in the record, with verses 41:30, 67:1–2, and *Sūra* 112 becoming most popular.[33] These verses invoke the oneness of God, his omnipotence, and the consolation of the angels to those who have been promised an otherworldly garden. For Christian converts to Islam as well as for Muslims living in lands populated by Christians, *Sūra* 112 had special importance, since it specified that God had begotten no one. Yet this verse, though polemicizing against trinitarian doctrine, neither celebrated the historical triumph of Islam, as did Qur'ān 9:33, nor did it draw an explicit distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. The declining popularity of verse 9:33 may well reflect an era when most of Egypt had already converted to Islam.

The key point, however, is that beginning in the late eighth century, a limited number of Qur'ānic verses began to appear regularly in tombstone inscriptions. This shift indicates a certain degree of formalization in the religion of Islam, the emergence of standard patterns that did not exist but a half-century earlier. It also reflects an important change in the orientation of Islam in the mainstream. Finally, in the late eighth century, Muslims turned in large numbers to commemorate their dead with Qur'ānic inscriptions, ostensibly believing in the efficacy of Muslim scripture in prayers for the deceased. To appreciate this change in the relation of tombstones to a ritual of interceding for the dead, let us consider the transformation that occurred between 650 and 800.

All tombstone inscriptions invite the literate passerby to read them, presumably out loud.[34] An illiterate audience wielding active competence in Arabic or commanding the language for liturgical purposes could easily participate in the oral performance at key moments, when prompted by the reader. (This is an important qualification, because it suggests how the illiterate and semiliterate could participate in a ritual that required literacy.)[35] In any case, without a reader, it is difficult to imagine much of a ceremony. With a reader in mind, however, we can easily hear him or her identifying the grave of ʻAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr, who died in the year 31 (652 CE), and uttering: "Seek forgiveness for him whenever this inscription is read, and say 'Amen!'" The congregation would then plead on behalf of the dead man and say, echoing the reader's words, "Amen!" In this case, the tombstone provides explicit ritual guidance: it beseeches the visitor to the tomb not merely to read the epitaph passively, but to intercede actively with God in favor of the deceased.[36]

Notably, already in the 650s, writing and reading occupied a role in Muslim public life. The tombstone of 652, which beckons us to read, calls for a religious performance of sorts, the ultimate objective being to persuade God to forgive ʻAbd al-Raḥmān ("Slave of the Merciful") and grant him entrance into the Garden. This ceremony of seeking God's forgiveness for the sins of another individual was perhaps one of the central aspects of Muslim piety during the first century of Islam, though it was not original to Islam.[37] This ritual of intercession began to change in a significant way in the 720s, as the tombstones from this period triggered a brief recitation derived from the Qur'ān. However, due to the brevity and lack of uniformity of their Qur'ānic citations, a ritual of Qur'ānic recitation cannot be inferred from these tombstones. Only by the late eighth century, when Qur'ānic quotations proliferated on tombstones such as the one from 795, does it become compelling to imagine liturgical or quasi-liturgical ceremonies at the cemetery. Muslims began in part to use a liturgical language in their inscriptions. Formulas that appear on these epitaphs, such as "fill his grave with light" or "make his grave more spacious," also appear in oral traditions that specify what liturgical formulas pietists used during funerary ceremonies.[38] The Qur'ānic phrases that appeared alongside these formulas on epitaphs served, in a sense, to mediate between the living and the dead.[39]

Outside evidence serves to support this suggestion that, in the late eighth century, a Qur'ānic liturgy developed at the cemetery. Opposition to the reading of the Qur'ān in the funerary prayer by Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767), al-Awzāʿī (d. 774), and Mālik (d. 795), indicates that, by the late eighth century, the Qur'ān was, in fact, recited in funerary ceremonies. Their criticism of Qur'ānic readings as an innovation deviating from the right practice (*ʻamal*) of Medina underscores the trend on display in the tombstone record.[40] This funeral prayer, issued once and immediately before burial, must not be confused with the intercessory prayer rooted in the reading of epitaphs and delivered repeatedly after burial. Both concerned the well-being of the deceased, however, and by the late eighth century, both were subject to popular pressure for an enhanced role for the Qur’ān.

As the practice of uttering Qur’ānic prayers for the dead gained popularity in various cities of the Islamic world outside of Medina, certain jurists decided realistically to adjust to the times. Al-Shāfiʿī (d. 820) in particular recommended reading at funerals the opening verses of the Qur’ān, though he was aware of the fact that “some people” opposed these recitations. As a result, he advised that opponents be told, “you have diverged from the revered practice, the *sunna!”* Other pietists, siding with al-Shāfi’ī, produced oral traditions on the authority of Muḥammad to support Qur’ānic recitations, which they perceived, if not as the venerable practice of the Muslim ancestors, then as the contemporary practice (*ʿamal*) in “perfection of the *sunna*” (*tamām al-sunna*).[41] Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) first opposed such recitations as an innovation (*bidʿa),* but after hearing that a reliable authority from Syria, Mubashshir al-Ḥalabī (d. 816), read the Qur’ān at funerals, he reversed his stance and recommended the new practice. According to one responsum concerning the right way to use the Qur’ān by the tomb, Ibn Ḥanbal censured the innovative practice of reading directly from a copy of the Qur’ān brought to the cemetery, yet he hoped there existed no harm in the oral recitation of scripture committed to memory.[42]

This legal discourse on the permissibility of reciting the Qur’ān during the prayer over the bier provides, alongside the tombstone record, a fascinating example of a fundamental transformation that took place in the liturgy of Islam in the eighth century. We observe an innovative, popular use of the Qur’ān gradually taking hold over the course of the eighth century. Eventually, on such occasions as the first night or the fortieth day after the burial, and generally on Fridays, Muslims would recite *Sūrat Yā’Sīn* (Qur’ān 36), *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Qur’ān 2), and *Sūrat al-Mulk* (Qur’ān 67). In some circles, the beginning of *al-Baqara* would be read at the front of the grave, the end at the back.[43]

The origin of such liturgical uses of the Qur’ān in prayers for the dead lies in the eighth century, as the tombstone record suggests and the legal discourse corroborates. The very absence of Qur’ānic references in the seventh-century tombstones does not prove that Muslims of that age did not recite from the Qur’ān in front of the grave. (We must be careful not to confuse the absence of evidence with the evidence of absence.) Yet clearly the seventh-century Muslims who commissioned the inscriptions did not find it important to encourage the recitation of particular Qur’ānic passages. By contrast, eighth-century inscriptions served to link a personage in the grave to specific verses from the Qur’ān, by the mediation of a reader.

Intercessory prayers for the dead could take various forms. Muslims could easily gather around a tomb in order to honor the deceased and offer there a free prayer without paying any attention to the tombstone inscription. In some cases, however, Muslims read epitaphs and prayed accordingly. To a certain extent, tombstone inscriptions directed, shaped, or inspired the intercessory prayers of these Muslims. Certainly, the Muslims who commissioned tombstone inscriptions did so in the hopes of finding readers who would pray on behalf of the dead. But their notions of what intercessors should read changed over time. In the seventh century, Muslims did not conceive of exercising much control over prayers for the dead. In that age, it mattered little to tombstone inscribers whether the living would seek forgiveness on behalf of the dead in one fashion or another. Accordingly, the ceremony of reading an epitaph at the grave might well have been complex in social and anthropological terms, and deeply meaningful, yet it was likely simple in liturgical terms. By contrast, the late eighth-century inscriptions reveal a religion with a deliberate sacramental character. By then, Muslims had grown intent on persuading other Muslims to read specific incantations for their benefit in the afterlife.

Having discussed the function of Qur’ānic readings in the late eighth century, let us turn our attention now to extra-Qur’ānic formulae. Rabīʿa ibn Maslama’s tombstone confesses that the Garden and the Fire are real.[44] This dogmatic pronouncement underscores Rabīʿa’s faith in God’s justice and in the resurrection. The tombstone also emphasizes a predestinarian belief in God’s omnipotence, *al-qadar.* Of greater significance is the prayer for God to fill Rabīʿa’s grave with light and to insinuate his *ḥujja* to him.[45] This term, translated above as “proof,” refers to the evidence or testimony a person presents in his or her own defense. In this context, it refers in particular to the proof of personal faith delivered to the angels Munkar and Nakīr during the inquisition in the grave. The appeal for God to fill the grave with light is predicated upon a belief system upholding not merely the continuity of human existence after death, but more specifically the existence of an afterlife in the grave. God had the power to make the grave more expansive or narrower, lighter or darker, in a field where the normal laws of physics were altogether suspended. His action, whether merciful or punishing, would depend entirely on the religion of the subject and on his or her record of good and bad deeds, according to the brand of orthodoxy upholding the dogma of personal responsibility.[46]

Islam displays a new face on the tombstone of 795. The merciful action of God will descend upon Rabīʿa ibn Maslama, it is hoped, on the basis of invocations delivered by the visitors to his grave on his behalf, asking for God’s forgiveness (*maghfira*) for his sins. This social fact must be underscored. Such a tombstone inscription does not simply commemorate the dead, indicating the site where lies the deceased and thereby allowing the mournful to gather, deprived of the beloved and removed from God. Rather, it activates a web of complex, imagined connections between God, a particular dead person, and the visitors uttering Qur’ānic prayers for his or her benefit not on the Day of Judgment, but with greater immediacy, in the period between death and the resurrection. It was in this period that Muslims would be forced to abide in the darkness of the grave, which Rabī‘a ibn Maslama feared, and to suffer tortures there.[47]

Only in rare instances do tombstones display such poor taste as to mention the “punishment in the grave” (*‘adhāb al-qabr*) explicitly. This was the punishment, of a purgatorial or a retributive nature, that many a Muslim was obliged to endure in the afterlife between death and the resurrection. It is referred to first in a tombstone from the year 180 AH (796 CE) and occasionally thereafter.[48] Muslims began to develop an original eschatology related to this form of punishment in the first quarter of the eighth century. Over the course of the eighth and ninth centuries, despite some Mu‘tazilite and Khārijite opposition, this belief system gained doctrinal status and a certain degree of institutionalization.[49] References in the late eighth-century epitaphs to this belief in the unpleasant nature of the sojourn in the grave, when coupled with prayers seeking God’s merciful deliverance, suggest a belief in the “magical” efficacy of the act of reading tombstone inscriptions. The dead, according to oral traditions recorded in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā’s *Book of the Graves,* needed the “invocation of the living” (*du‘ā’al-aḥyā’),* which in the darkness of the tomb would be transformed into something resembling light.[50]

The tombstones from the 790s mark the endpoint of this inquiry into the reorientation of early Islam. We began with the monuments from the 650s, which commemorated the deaths of Muslims but without displaying distinctively Islamic signs. Then we turned to the fascinating tombstones from 691 and 721, observing the emergence of a new sense of communal identity and remarking upon the first uses of the Qur’ān to Islamicize death. Finally, we reached Rabī‘a ibn Maslama’s formulaic tombstone, with its standard references to popular Qur’ānic verses and to Muslim beliefs in the afterlife.

Yet we must not think of Rabī‘a ibn Maslama’s tombstone as the final destination of this process of Islamization, for two reasons. First, tombstone inscriptions did not remain fixed to this form down through the ages. Despite the high incidence of recurrence of certain Qur’ānic quotations, tombstone style continued to change within a particular locality and continued to vary from region to region.[51] Second, we cannot take for granted the “Islamic” character of Rabī‘a ibn Maslama’s tombstone, since epitaphs in general were not universally admired as repositories of an “Islamic” form. Critics of this institution will indeed force us to consider a different Islamic path. So far, the changes in the tombstone record have revealed a picture of Islam in motion. But how did the gatekeepers of the Muslim tradition, the pietists who were generally opposed to religious change, respond to the rise of an Islamic tombstone culture?

Traditionist Opposition to Tombstones

Not all Muslims who lived in the century between the deaths of ‘Abbāsa and Rabī‘a would have approved of the process of Islamization that tombstones illustrated. Many traditionists would have in fact disavowed the historical view that it was an “Islamic” process, for, as we shall see, they dismissed all tombstone inscriptions as an anti-Islamic innovation and related oral traditions in the name of the Prophet to support their case. Since numerous Muslims chose to commemorate their deaths with Qur’ānic inscriptions, either disregarding or ignoring traditionist protestations, historians may be tempted to dismiss oral traditions against tombstones as ineffective if not irrelevant. Yet the examination of these oral traditions is worthwhile, because it offers one of the few instances where the Oral Tradition can be linked in a straightforward manner to a record of material culture. In this way, we shall observe how the traditionist mentality developed—not so much in order to preserve the collective memory of Medina’s golden age, but in reaction to popular practices that emerged outside of Medina after Muḥammad’s death.

Oral traditions specifying that the Prophet had prohibited plastering and building over the grave sometimes include a trailer indicating that he had also prohibited writing upon the grave (*nahā … an yuktaba ‘alayhi*). The person associated with this addendum (*ziyāda*) was Sulaymān ibn Mūsā (d. 737), a collector of oral traditions from Syria. Reportedly, he delivered the enhanced tradition on the authority of Jābir (ibn ‘Abdallah, d. 697), one of the Prophet’s Helpers from Medina, and transmitted it to Ibn Jurayj (‘Abd al-Malik ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, d. 767). A famous traditionist from Mecca, Ibn Jurayj in turn transmitted the tradition to Ḥafṣ (ibn Ghiyāth ibn Ṭalq, d. 809) of Kūfa and, in a slightly different version, to Abū Mu‘āwiya (Muḥammad ibn Khāzim, d. 810), also of Kūfa. In variant traditions that smoothly integrate the prohibition against inscribing tombstones into a general pronouncement against building on graves, Sulaymān ibn Mūsā is not invoked. He is then replaced in the chain of transmission by Abū al-Zubayr (Muḥammad ibn Muslim, d. ca. 744) of Mecca.[52] Sulaymān ibn Mūsā’s tradition conveys the image of a single, thin thread traveling far and wide over the course of the eighth century, from Damascus to Mecca and onward to Kūfa. The smoother version ascribed to Abū al-Zubayr leaves aside the Syrian informant, whose link to the Medinese Jābir ibn ʻAbdallāh, the Prophet's companion, was questionable. It emphasizes instead circulation within western Arabia culminating in transmission to Mesopotamia. If Ibn Jurayj, a "common link" in these traditions, genuinely transmitted them, then they emerged before the deaths of Sulaymān ibn Mūsā and Abū al-Zubayr in the second quarter of the eighth century. But another possibility readily comes to mind in order to account for the smoother version. Perhaps Ibn Jurayj heard a dictum against writing on graves from Sulaymān ibn Mūsā and a dictum against plastering and building on graves from Abū al-Zubayr. Then, at some point he or a later authority may have integrated the two pronouncements into one and doctored the history of oral transmission, replacing Sulaymān ibn Mūsā with Abū al-Zubayr in order to make the chain of transmission appear more reliable. Regardless, perhaps Sulaymān ibn Mūsā indeed transmitted to Ibn Jurayj a prohibition against epitaphs ascribed to the prophet Muḥammad.[53]

In seeking to account for the origins of traditionist opposition to tombstone inscriptions, we should also consider the possibility of external influence. In the case under consideration, one may point to a Jewish precedent. Both Genesis Rabbah and the Jerusalem Talmud report that Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel declared, "One does not erect ornate tombstones [*nefashot*] for the righteous, as their oral teachings ought to comprise their memorial [*divreyhen hen zikhronan].*" It turns out that wealthy Jews began decorating tombstones with inscriptions only under Greek and Roman influence, and this fashion of commemorating the dead was not much appreciated by austere-minded rabbis. The Babylonian Talmud even admonishes that reading inscriptions on graves affects one's learning adversely.[54] Did Sulaymān ibn Mūsā, perhaps a Jewish convert to Islam, ascribe a rabbinical dictum to the prophet Muḥammad?

This suggestion may seem offensive to anyone who would like to believe the Oral Tradition was revealed in Mecca and Medina before 632 and by and large preserved integrally for two centuries until finally it reached canonical, written form. But there are reasons also for secular historians to feel highly dissatisfied with a conclusion of this order. Why should it matter to us that a derivative opinion against writing on tombstones originated with a certain Sulaymān ibn Mūsā? To trace atomistically a specific opinion against tombstone inscriptions to a particular individual would betray a less than adequate understanding of how ideas developed and why they mattered. New ideas arose and old ones resurfaced for good reasons. Unfolding was an inexorable process having relatively little to do with the individual genius of figures such as Sulaymān ibn Mūsā.

The rabbinical bias against tombstone inscriptions may be regarded at most as a proximate cause of the early Muslim bias. It is possible that Jewish converts to Islam, or Muslims engaging in dialogue with Jews, colored the Muslim discourse. Yet, as we shall see, the ultimate causes for the Muslim bias were different: current use of tombstones, knowledge that tombstone inscriptions did not form part of the indigenous practice of Medina's golden age, and general opposition to pompous structures commemorating the dead. These three causes sufficiently account for the Muslim prejudice, which might have arisen in some form or other without Jewish influence.

Opposition to tombstone inscriptions was, in fact, geographically widespread in the eighth century. ʻUmar II (r. 717–720), the caliph who has earned a reputation for advancing posthumously the pious practice of the good old days, not only forbade that graves be built upon with brick (*bi-ājurr*); he also "abhorred the grave be given a distinguishing mark" (*kariha an yuʻallama `l-qabr*).[55] One of "the seven lawyers of Medina," al-Qāsim (ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, d. 724), a man who might also have campaigned against writing on another front, decreed in his will: "My son, do not write on my grave" (*lā taktub ʻalā qabrī*).[56] A Baṣran who settled down in Mecca, Mubārak (ibn Ḥassān al-Sulamī), told a Khurasānī who settled down in Kūfa, Zayd ibn al-Ḥubāb (ibn al-Rayyān, d. 818), that al-Ḥasan the Baṣran (d. 728) found repugnant the placing of "a tablet over the grave" (*lawḥ ʻala `l-qabr*). "They used to detest that a man mark his grave" (*yakrahūna an yuʻallima `l-rajulu qabrahu*), another *ḥadīth* relates, on the authority of the Basran Salīm ibn Ḥayyān and the Kūfans Ḥammād (ibn Abī Sulaymān, d. 738) and Ibrāhīm (al-Nakhaʻī, d. 715).[57] Yaḥyā ibn al-ʻAlā' (al-Bajalī), an informant who acquired a reputation for mendaciousness, reported that Rāshid ibn Saʻd (al-Ḥimṣī, d. 726) told his fellow traditionist from Homs (Emesa) in central Syria, al-Aḥwāṣ ibn Ḥakīm (ibn ʻUmayr al-Hamdānī), that Muḥammad had prohibited plastering graves (*taqṣīṣ al-qubūr),* crowning them with an erect structure (*taklīl),* and writing on them.[58]

Considered broadly, the traditions above suggest that opposition to tombstone markers took place wherever traditionists lived. This reaction occurred at some point in the seventh or eighth centuries. Certainly it originated at the latest by the last quarter of the eighth century, since the oral traditions in question were recorded by ʻAbd al-Razzāq (744–827) and Ibn Abī Shayba (775–849), among others. Maybe the traditions originated earlier, however. It is impossible to determine whether or not particular authorities from the turn of the eighth century—figures such as al-Qāsim in Medina, Abū al-Zubayr in Mecca, Ibrāhīm in Kūfa, al-Ḥasan in Baṣra, Rāshid in Homs, and

Sulaymān in Damascus—actually delivered the opinions ascribed to them. Nevertheless, the existence of Islamic tombstones from 691, 694, 721, and 729 makes it reasonable to hold that certain religious authorities from this period opposed the developing practice.[59] Given the difficulties of dating the origins of any controversy played out in the oral traditions, this is remarkable evidence.

The reasons for eighth-century opposition by traditionists to tombstone inscriptions are not entirely clear. An eleventh century Mālikite jurist, Muḥammad ibn Rushd, would claim that Malik (ca. 712–795), the master of Medina, had abhorred the “inscribed flagstone” because the practice was one of the innovations (*bida‘*) by which powerful magnates (*ahl al-ṭawl*) seek glory and fame. In attributing this opinion to Malik, he seems to have erred. Malik himself abhorred the practice of piling up stones at the grave, surely in reference to the mound or pillbox cairns so commonly spotted throughout Arabia. But he seems not to have preached against tombstone inscriptions specifically. If tombstone inscriptions were not all that popular in eighth-century Medina, then Malik may have had little reason to be concerned with the innovation.[60] Rather, it was an Egyptian Mālikite, Ibn al-Qāsim (d. 806), who abhorred that an inscribed flagstone (*balāṭa*) be placed on the grave. He declared there was no problem with the use of stone or wood in memorials for the dead, so long as nothing was written on these materials by which a man might identify the grave’s inhabitant (*walī).*[61] That this opinion against inscribed flagstones should have occurred to a Mālikite jurist from Egypt is interesting, for it was in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean, and particularly in Egypt, that Muslims turned in large numbers to commemorate their dead with tombstone inscriptions. As an Egyptian transmitter of Medinese doctrine, Ibn al-Qāsim was highly aware of the discrepancies between this popular Egyptian practice and the venerable Medinese tradition.

The controversy over plastering and building upon graves, associated with writing on tombstones, did center on an egalitarian principle: “the leveling of the graves” (*taswiyat al-qubūr*). In the words of a North African jurist who flourished in the early eighth century, Bakr Ibn Sawāda, “the graves are to be leveled with the ground” (*kānat al-qubūr li-tusawwā bi `l-arḍ).*[62] Jurists who resented tombstone inscriptions as an innovation deviating from the custom of the Prophet’s Companions argued eventually that the dead had no need (*ḥāja*) for this form of worldly embellishment (*zīna*). In their eyes, squandering capital without benefit seemed abhorrent (*makrūh*).[63]

This austere-minded reaction to an innovative practice that had developed outside of Medina was not the only reason for the original opposition; another reason was suggested by Ibn al-Qāsim. The eighth-century discourse seems primarily interested in preventing the marking of graves, hence the use of the verb "to be given a recognizable mark" (*yu'allamu*). Thus, the Kūfan jurist Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) found reprehensible the distinguishing of a grave with a sign (*'alāma*).[64] In other words, the other key problem with inscribed tombstones was their capacity to identify the graves of particular persons. Why pietists found this development a matter of concern it is not difficult to guess, given their opposition to intercession on behalf of the dead, to women visiting tombs, and to the cult of the saints. Ibn al-Ḥajj (d. 1336), a Mālikite Egyptian scholar, would explain this concern well in his tirade against epitaphs. He railed against the practice of people seeking fame, who commission inscriptions for the graves of saints, ancient scholars, and pious ancestors, in order to spur graveside tourism. In this practice, born out of religious ignorance and godlessness, he identified a source of corruption.[65]

Such persuasive preaching against the "idolatrous" practice of visiting tombs did, under the right conditions, culminate in violent action. The razing of the cemetery of al-Baqī', instigated by Wahhabi zealots, serves as a recent, memorable example.[66] In early Islamic times, opposition to tombstones could also on occasion become forceful, as indicated by a story about political action against a tombstone of high symbolic value. In the 660s or 670s, while Marwan I was the governor of Medina, he passed by a rock in the cemetery of al-Baqī' that commemorated the burial site of 'Uthmān ibn Maẓ'ūn (d. 624), an early convert to Islam who fought at the Battle of Badr. According to Muslim tradition, the prophet Muḥammad himself had commanded the placement of this rock in honor of the deceased man, "so that I will recognize him by it." This was the first burial of a Muslim at al-Baqī', and from this point onward, the Muslims of Medina, following the Prophet's example, would bury their dead at the same cemetery. Disregarding this history, Marwan I ordered the removal of the monument: "By God, there will not be in the grave of 'Uthmān ibn Maẓ'ūn a rock by which he can be recognized" (*ḥajar yu'rafu bihi*). The "Banū Umayya"—a category representing in this case the Sufyanid branch of the Umayyad dynasty (661–684)—complained to the Medinese governor and eventual founder of the Marwanid branch of this dynasty (684–750) about the removal of a memorial set in place by the Prophet. "It is wretched what you have done," they declared. To which the caliph-to-be replied, "No way, since I removed it, it cannot be returned."[67] The story is complicated, as are many oral traditions, and not necessarily true. It possibly symbolizes the 'Abbasid perception of a shift in policy that occurred between Sufyanid and Marwanid times. Alternatively, it may represent Shī'ite memories of the destruction of commemorative monuments by 'Abbasid governors. Governmental demolitions of specific monuments and of unclaimed graves did occur in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.[68] What matters is that violent opposition to tombstones had not only its supporters but also its detractors.

This last point brings up questions of some significance in the history of religion: How uniform was the opposition of Muslim scholars to tombstone inscriptions? Were they all impractical idealists who abhorred popular practices that deviated from the traditional customs of Medina? When they observed that ordinary Muslims were decorating their tombstones with Qur'ānic quotations and testaments of belief, did some of them not begin to approve of this practice and to see in it the potential to spread the word of Islam? Or was the tension between this popular practice and traditionist ideals so taut that Muslim scholars, overwhelmed by tradition, were unable to perceive religious change in a positive light? To answer these questions, we shall need to consider later developments in Sunni and Shīʿite law.

Early Shīʿite Versus Late Sunni Concessions

The *History of Medina* by Ibn Shabba (d. 875) includes a number of stories representing tombstone inscriptions without censure. In this account we hear of the serendipitous discovery of epitaphs commemorating the death of personages closely associated with the prophet Muḥammad. Thus, when ʿAqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. ca. 675) was digging a well in his house, he found an inscribed stone (*ḥajar manqūsh*) that revealed: "The grave of Umm Ḥabība, the daughter of Ṣakhr ibn Ḥarb." This referred to Ramla bint Abī Sufyān (d. 664), a Meccan woman who married Muḥammad upon her return from an excursion to Abyssinia. Another story recounts what happened when a gravedigger was burying Muḥammad ibn Zayd ibn Alī, a son of the leader of the revolt that gave rise to the Zaydi branch of Shīʿism. At the depth of eight hand-spans he discovered a "broken stone, upon which something was written." On it he managed to decipher the inscription: "Umm Salama, wife of the Prophet," who died in the year 59 AH (679 CE).[69] Apocryphal or not, these stories served to link close members of Muḥammad's family to tombstone inscriptions. In this manner they signaled approval for the practice, though without tracing its origins to Muḥammad's lifetime or to the first half of the seventh century.

It is said that Fāṭima (d. 632), the daughter of the Prophet and a figure positively associated with the cult of the dead, used to visit the grave of Medina's martyr, Ḥamza, which she recognized by a stone (*ḥajar*).[70] Fāṭima was the key female figure and the noblest exemplar in the tradition of the Shīʿites. A tradition in her name condoning the use of a commemorative stone (lacking an inscription) is not altogether surprising, as Shīʿite traditions diverged sharply from Sunni ones in condoning the use of tombstone inscriptions. Zaydi and Ismāʿīli Shīʿites joined Twelver Shīʿites in this permissive attitude toward tombstones. Thus the Ismāʿīli chief judge of the Fāṭimid caliphate, al-Nuʿmān (d. 974), related that Muhammad had placed a stone (*ḥajar*) at the head of ʿUthmān ibn Maẓʿūn's grave, approving of its use as a sign (*ʿalam*) for the burial of kin.[71] The Zaydi-Muʿtazilite al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq (d. 911), founder of the Zaydi imamate in Yemen, considered it unproblematic for a boulder (*ṣakhra*) engraved with the deceased's name to be placed at the head of the grave. Boulders were preferable to tablets (*alwāḥ*), he claimed, but the latter were acceptable.[72] The Zaydi Yaḥyā ibn Ḥamza (d. 1348) commented on a new trend: the use of two stones to mark women's graves. The Zaydi-Muʿtazilite Ibn al-Murtaḍā (d. 1437) deemed the practice unproblematic if its purpose was to distinguish the grave. Inscribing a boulder with the name of the deceased was perfectly acceptable in the Zaydi tradition, so long as this was done in a simple manner, without ornamentation (*zakhrafa*). Key early Zaydi authorities, including al-Qasim ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (d. 860), approved of this practice. They justified it by citing Muḥammad's action with ʿUthmān ibn Maẓʿūn.[73] A ninth-century jurist associated with the eleventh Imaām of the Twelver Shīʿites, Sahl ibn Ziyād (al-Rāzī), related the following story about the seventh Imām:

> When Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā (al-Kāẓim, d. 799) was returning from Baghdad to Medina, his daughter died in Fayd, a village on the way between Kūfa and Mecca. So he buried her, and ordered one of his non-Arab clients [*mawālī*] to plaster her grave, and inscribe upon a tablet [*lawḥ*] her name, and place it within her grave [*fi `l-qabr*].

The purport of this Shīʿite tale, the collector of the tradition makes clear, was to lift the interdiction (*ḥaẓr*) from writing on tombs—by way of this sanction (*rukhṣa*).[74]

Unlike Shīʿites, Sunni jurists were unable to strike down the prohibition against inscriptions by referring to the authoritative example of an Imam. For Sunnis, divine revelation had ended with the Prophet's death and, for this reason, they were less capable—or rather, they faced a greater challenge—than did Shīʿites in accommodating religious change. Bound as they were to the oral tradition holding that Muḥammad had prohibited writing upon the grave, Sunni jurists remained down the ages virtually unanimous in considering this practice reprehensible (*makrūh*).[75] In certain cases, following the

Prophet’s example with ‘Uthmān ibn Maẓ‘ūn, they did sanction the use of grave markers devoid of epitaphs, which would serve to recognize individual burial sites.[76]

Rarely did they consider tombstone inscriptions acceptable. In an exceptional ruling, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), the famous Andalusian scholar of the Ẓāhirī school of law, declared that he did not abhor the engraving of the deceased’s name on a stone.[77] Unfortunately, he did not explain the grounds for his reasoning. After declaring sound two traditions against tombstone inscriptions, al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 1014) conceded that “the practice [*‘amal*] is not in accordance with the traditions, for both in the East and the West the graves of the Imams of the Muslims are inscribed. This is a practice that the descendants of the ancestors adopted.”[78] From a strict traditionist perspective, the sound nature of the traditions entailed an unequivocal prohibition against writing. Disarmingly, al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī acknowledged that the practice of the descendants had diverged from that of the ancestors and in this way recognized, if not condoned, a change in the practice of Muslims. Entertaining doubts about the soundness of Sulaymān ibn Mūsā’s addendum, Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1148), a commentator on traditions from Seville, formulated a more permissive position than did al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī. His view was that people ought to be treated kindly or indulged forgivingly for daubing graves with clay or commissioning tombstone inscriptions, since there is a benefit in marking a burial site to prevent it from falling into oblivion.[79]

Aware of the opinions of both al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī and Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-Wansharīsī (d. 1508) judged writing on tombstones permissible, yet imposed one condition: the memorials should be placed vertically, rather than horizontally, lest people trample on them. In the context of a discussion on the legality of decreeing in one’s last will the wish to be buried with a copy of the Qur’ān or of al-Bukhārī’s authoritative collection of traditions, al-Wansharīsī returned to our subject. Inscribing a headstone with God’s name, Qur’ānic verses, and the Muslim profession of faith that there is but one God and Muḥammad is his messenger (*shahādatān*), seemed unproblematic. This practice, which does no harm to our (dead) neighbors at the cemetery, has become part of the customary law (*‘urf*) in Muslim cities.[80] Al-Wansharīsī’s relatively permissive attitude toward Qur’ānic inscriptions is surprising, given the traditionist rejection of tombstones. Notably, however, al-Wansharīsī did not recommend such inscriptions. He merely considered them unproblematic. It is striking that it took over seven centuries after the rise of the practice for a Sunni scholar to come up with such a lukewarm acceptance of Qur’ānic inscriptions.

Still, by finding acceptable tombstones of this kind, al-Wansharīsī diverged from the opinion of other Sunni jurists. Al-Adhra‘ī (Shihāb al-

Dīn Aḥmad ibn Ḥamdān, d. 1381), a Shāfiʿite jurist, turned to analogical reasoning in order to declare such tombstones unlawful (*taḥrīm*). In his view, inscribing the Qur'ān on graves exposed Muslim scripture to trampling underfoot, not to mention the impurity flowing from corpses.[81] Prey to similar fears, the Mālikite scholar Ibn al-Ḥajj (d. 1336) conjured up a terrifying image. By perpetrating the innovation of engraving a tombstone with Qur'ānic quotations, which would include one of God's names, one risked debasing Islam. These tombstones might fall into oblivion, a robber might plunder them, and they might end up face down in a toilet. There, a Muslim might trample upon them unknowingly, a Jew or a Christian audaciously.[82]

The Paradox of Islamization

The forceful rejection of inscribing tombstones with Qur'ānic verses reveals the workings of a traditionist mentality. Opposition to this popular practice was grounded, of course, in the traditionist view that the Muslim customs of Medina in Muḥammad's age were perfect and all subsequent "religious" developments were in essence irreligious. However, this opposition did not derive from abstract contemplation of a golden past, for despite themselves traditionists lived in their own age. Their opinions emerged in reaction to a practice that arose long after Muḥammad's death and thus bore no relation to the Prophet's own preoccupations with the matters of his day.

Due to traditionist opposition to any religious change not directed by Muḥammad, a relatively wide gap arose in Islamic history between Sunni ideals and novel practices. In the traditionist discourse against the innovation of tombstones, one can notice such a gap and, at the same time, sense the distance that began to open in the eighth century between the traditionist vision of Islam and the reality of popular Islam. In certain cases, where tombstones were sanctioned, the distance, though palpable, seems easily bridgeable. In other cases, however, a gulf between the two shores seems to emerge, with the separation manifesting itself in an elitist, learned rejection of practices not rooted in Muslim tradition. This gap should not be exaggerated, however. It privileges the traditionist construct of a basic distinction between universal Muslim customs and innovative local practices. It fails to account for the existence within the traditionist movement of an adaptive tendency that worked to accommodate if not appropriate local customs. And it suggests that a tremendous cultural barrier divided the religion of the traditionists from the religion of the vulgar.[83]

In fact, the barrier between one and the other side was not as high as diehard traditionists imagined it. Consider, in this respect, the position of tombstone inscribers. They were by no means unlearned. They were literate. They referred to the power of God in dogmatic terms, understood orthodox Muslim views of salvation and the afterlife, issued standard confessions of faith, and accurately quoted the Qur'ān. Culturally speaking, their inscriptions were subject to both upward and downward pressures: a downward pressure because they agreed, despite their learning, to indulge the Muslims who insisted on memorializing the dead; an upward pressure because they possessed the knowledge not to deviate in their formularies from Muslim dogma. Perhaps for this reason traditionists directed their barbs not so much against ignorant persons as against innovative practices. Yet it was precisely because these practices contained a mixture of elements mediating between high and low that they worked effectively as a force of acculturation. They served, on the one hand, to diffuse Islamic notions to the population at large, and on the other hand, to define by opposition the reactive tendency within the traditionist movement.

Ironically, traditionists rejected not only "dangerous" innovations, but also the perfectly pious practices of reciting the Qur'ān at the cemetery and inscribing memorials to the dead with God's name and the profession of faith. Though foreign to the Medina of Muḥammad's age, such practices became an essential mechanism by which, over the course of the eighth century, Islam spread to and grew rooted in South Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the Mediterranean world. As a culture of inscriptions already existed in these regions before the rise of Islam, it fell upon Muslims first to adopt and eventually to transform pre-Islamic forms. In fact, it is difficult to imagine how Islam could have become a world religion had Muslims such as 'Abbāsa bint Jurayj and Rabī'a ibn Maslama not appropriated such forms in violation of traditionist ideals. Here lies buried the paradox of Islamization.

CHAPTER TWO

Washing the Corpse in Arabia and Mesopotamia

The Qur’ān does not reveal, even in parables, how the last of the Prophets died and what became of his corpse. It provides but an allusion to his death in a verse (Qur’ān 3:144) that fails to predict whether he would die in a natural or a violent way: “Muḥammad is only a messenger. Other messengers have already passed away before him, so if he dies or is slain, will you turn on your heels?” Unlike the Qur’ān, the oldest extant biography, by Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), depicts in some detail the events surrounding Muḥammad’s death in the summer of 632. Allegiance had already been sworn to the first caliph when ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, a relative of Muḥammad’s with vain hopes of becoming the first caliph, began the preparations for burial. With the corpse and a select group of men, he locked himself inside the bedroom of Muḥammad’s youngest and most beloved wife, ‘Ā’isha. Acting as the gatekeeper, he allowed a certain personage to enter the room and once again closed the door. After this, he drew the Prophet toward his chest while two men poured water over him and others helped turn the Prophet over. Then, with the Prophet’s long shirt (*qamīṣ*) still on him, ‘Alī “rubbed him with it from behind” without touching the skin directly. At this point he swore, “your smell is as sweet dead as alive.” Of what is normally observed with respect to the dead, “nothing was seen.”[1]

This story concerns the washing of an extraordinary corpse at a unique historical juncture. Even so, it forms part of a broader legal discourse on the washing of ordinary corpses in the course of everyday life. This discourse was largely shaped by the social and religious preoccupations of pietists from two cities of Mesopotamia, Kūfa and Baṣra. Surprisingly, Kūfan and Baṣran traditions and laws regarding this ritual of death came to diverge not only from Medinese precedents, but also in a striking way from Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian formulations. In the cities of Mesopotamia, pietists elaborated new laws regarding beautification of the dead. Kūfan and Baṣran pietists imbued certain parts of the human body with religious significance, in an exercise foreign to the spirit of Medinese law. The discussion will illustrate a vast change in social attitudes toward the corpse that occurred as Islam's center of gravity shifted from the Arabian to the Mesopotamian environment. Here, in the matter of corpse washing, we have an exceptional body of evidence, a prism through which to view how the *Sharīʿa*—the sacred law of Islam—became differentiated over the course of the eighth century as a consequence of this momentous spatial translation.

Outside of Arabia, legal sources came to concentrate in particular on the relationship between husband and wife. The death of one or the other signaled a dramatic transition, bringing the bond by marriage near or past the breaking point. As a result of death, it ceased to be clear in the mind of Mesopotamian jurists whether or not a spouse had the right to handle the corpse of the person to whom he or she had once been married. In general, early Arabic sources are unusually reticent about the character of marriage bonds and the sexual life within the homestead. Muslims preferred to disclose only what already concerned the public eye, leaving the rest to our imagination.[2] In the absence of good evidence, some historians have felt compelled to describe the "conjugal emotions" that must have flowed between husbands and wives. Much of this is mere speculation.[3] Though Muslims were highly secretive about their life behind doors, death terminated the strictly private relationship between husband and wife. With the rushing of kin and neighbors into the home, and the undertaking of rituals to prepare the corpse for burial, this relationship turned equivocal, neither public nor private, and open to legal enquiry. Kūfan jurists in particular abandoned their normal reticence, as they contested a ritual of separation between husband and wife that had been sanctioned by Medinese law.

Kūfan pietists worried about wives washing the corpses of their ex-husbands. They also worried, alongside Baṣran pietists, about their posthumous reputation and the inviolability of their bodies. They feared, what with the immobilization of their limbs, that their bodies would be subjected to disgraceful treatment by lovers or strangers. How the washer might clean a corpse while protecting its private parts from exposure was a key problem driving their discussion. In the name of discretion, they dared to discuss matters rarely consigned to writing, revealing their valuation of the human body at a surprisingly intimate level.[4] Before examining their concerns, let us first return to Ibn Isḥāq's account of the washing of Muḥammad's corpse and then explore the representation of the ritual in Medinese law.

Ibn Isḥāq died about 135 years after Muḥammad. His treatment of the Prophet's death in *The Life of Muḥammad* is important due to its early date and enlightening because of his unique vantage point. He left Medina to lecture about Muḥammad's life and times in the eastern cities of the caliphate, in Rayy, Kūfa, Baṣra, and the newly founded Baghdad. He was therefore self-conscious about the interest of the Muslims who lived in these cities in his story, and he was aware of the dislocation that Islam suffered as it became established outside of Arabia. About the washing of Muḥammad's corpse he chose to tell two long stories.

The first story, presented in the introduction to this chapter, he narrated on the authority of Medinese traditionists and "others of our companions."[5] According to these informants, the actors in the event had been, among others, Muḥammad's paternal cousin and son-in-law, 'Alī; Muḥammad's uncle al-'Abbās (d. ca. 654); Shuqrān, the Apostle's freedman; and a Medinese Helper who had fought in the battle of Badr, Aws ibn Khawlī. These participants—all men—were relatives or intimate associates of Muḥammad's.

The second story is more fanciful. Ibn Isḥāq heard it only from Yaḥyā ibn 'Abbād ibn 'Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, who heard it from his father 'Abbād, who allegedly heard it from the Prophet's wife 'Ā'isha. For convenience, let us refer to it as 'Ā'isha's tradition:

> When they [perhaps the company of men mentioned in the first tradition] desired the washing of the Messenger of God, they diverged in opinion about it [*ikhtalafū fīhi*]. They said, "By God! We do not know whether we should strip [*anujarridu*] the Messenger of his garments [*thiyāb*], just as we strip our dead, or wash him with his clothes on." She said, "When they differed with one another, God cast sleep down upon them, so that there was not a man amongst them [*mā minhum rajulun*] whose chin did not drop to his chest. Then a speaker [*mukallim*] they did not recognize told them from the corner of the room to wash the Prophet with his garments on." She said, "So they rose toward the Messenger, and washed him with his long shirt [*qamīṣ*] on, pouring water over the long shirt, rubbing him [*yadlukūnahu*] with the long shirt [intervening between his body] and their hands.[6]

This was God's first intervention in history following the death of the last Prophet. Why did it occur? Why did Ibn Isḥāq and his informants find it necessary to reveal in precise detail how Muḥammad’s corpse had been handled? What was at stake for them in remembering or imagining these events several generations after their occurrence?

The ritual had become a key event in the early Islamic historical imagination. It took place while the Prophet lay helpless and in silence; this forced Muḥammad’s biographer to consider how his subject had been handled in the absence of prophetic guidance. Perhaps God interfered in the event to reassure the Muslim community that though Muḥammad “was already dead” (*qad māta*), as the first caliph had just exclaimed, “God was alive” and still guiding Muslims.[7] More likely God’s intervention at this particular moment in history occurred for a particular reason: to resolve a religious dilemma. Ibn Isḥāq and his informants wished to remember that the Prophet’s body had been buried in a state of purity, absolved from the dirt of this world. Yet they were reluctant to imagine him scrubbed in the traditional way and stripped naked, “just as we strip our dead,” with his zone of shame uncovered.

Shī‘ite traditions, which commemorate ‘Alī’s role in the event, similarly emphasize measures taken to protect Muḥammad’s private parts from exposure. Thus an early Zaydi tradition holds that a mysterious herald warned ‘Alī, “Do not slip off the long shirt!” God would blind anyone who dared to examine parts of the body under the shirt. According to an Ismā‘īli tradition, ‘Alī recalled:

> When God’s Messenger decreed by will [*awṣā*] that I should wash him, and that no one else should wash him, I said, “Oh, God’s Messenger, but you are a man with a heavy body. I cannot turn you upside down alone.” So he said to me, “But [the angel] Gabriel will be with you directing my washing.” I asked, “And who will pour the water?” He replied, “Al-Faḍl will pour the water for you, but tell him to cover his eyes because anyone who gazes at my zone of shame [*‘awratī*] other than you will lose his eyesight.”[8]

Let us focus momentarily on ‘Alī. Shī‘ites believed he had the most valid claim to become the first caliph on account of his close paternal kinship with the Prophet. The two traditions in Ibn Isḥāq’s biography present different versions of his role in the event. The first shows ‘Alī, as gatekeeper and corpse washer, presiding over a group of men and firmly in control of the dead body, tenderly preoccupied with its sweet odor.[9] ‘Ā’isha’s tradition, by contrast, seems to cast a shadow over ‘Alī, her legendary enemy from the Battle of the Camel. It portrays a crowd of men disputing without guidance about the right way to wash the Prophet’s body. There is a terrible sense of loss and confusion. ‘Alī fails to assert his voice. His hesitation to act and lead becomes palpable, in a silence that hints at his political fortune. We witness a breakdown of leadership. Just as one party gets ready to take the Prophet's tunic off, Ibn Isḥāq pops the *deus ex machina* on stage: "God cast sleep down upon them." This literary device only highlights the suspense.

A historian has recently analyzed the events surrounding Muḥammad's death in an endeavor to prove that on a certain Monday, at the very same time that "the kin of the Prophet were busy with the funeral preparations," Abū Bakr engaged with the Meccan Emigrants to Medina in "political machinations." This argument focuses on a political contest between Abū Bakr, who became the first caliph, and 'Alī, who took charge of the corpse. It seeks to revise the chronology of events provided by Muḥammad's famous biographer. Allegedly, Ibn Isḥāq reported that the burial took place on Tuesday night, rather than on Monday, to allow Abū Bakr to play a part in the Prophet's burial. In this manner, he supposedly sought to buttress "the orthodox Medinese position."[10] But it is not clear what happened in Medina on that Monday or that Tuesday of the year 632. Subtle analysis sensitive to sectarian politics reveals elements of confusion or falsification in the outer layers of Ibn Isḥāq's story—it does not necessarily extract the kernel of Medinese history. The *Life of Muḥammad* contains oral traditions that were in circulation about four generations after Muḥammad's death. By this time, many of the stories had become thick descriptions far removed from the actual events. The traditions that described the washing of Muḥammad's corpse had as much to do with disputes about ritual form as with the politics of succession.

Political historians might readily appreciate the irony that while 'Alī tended to Muḥammad's dead body, Abū Bakr schemed for the caliphate. What is perhaps more difficult to perceive is the ritual drama that unfolded in 'Ā'isha's bedroom, with its all-male cast of irresolute corpse washers. Where, in the meantime, were 'Ā'isha and the rest of Muḥammad's wives? Why were they not helping prepare their husband's corpse for burial? Oddly enough, 'Ā'isha related the tradition revealing that God had sent sleep upon the breasts of men. Either she was missing from her bedroom while all this happened, in which case her report of God's intervention is second hand, or else she was present at the scene and witnessed consciousness escape the confounded men.

Unlike 'Alī and his company of men, Muḥammad's wives were already familiar with the Prophet's body and had some experience in washing it. Consider, for instance, the episode of bathing at the onset of the Prophet's malady. According to a medical report some would deny as slanderous, he had been afflicted with pleurisy (*dhāt al-janb*):

“That is a malady with which God would not upbraid me” (*inna dhālika la-dā’ mā kāna Allāh la-yaqdhifanī bihi*), Muḥammad protested. Though suffering from much pain, Muḥammad wished to leave home in order to issue final instructions to the people. He commanded his wives to pour water on him from seven different wells, a task they carried out using Ḥafṣa’s laundry tub (*mikhḍab*). When Muḥammad returned home from this excursion, he fell into an unconscious swoon, during which some of his wives fed him a drug (*dawā’*) they had brought with them from Ethiopia. Upon reawakening, Muḥammad was furious. God alone could have prevented or cured him of the inflammation of the pleura. Resenting the treatment, Muḥammad forced all the women in his house to take a dose of their own medicine. What matters for our purposes is that before this episode, Muḥammad had asked his wives to wash his body. ‘Ā’isha herself claimed having bathed with her husband as one of her ten distinctions: “The Messenger and I used to wash from a single vessel and he did not do that with any of his wives except me.”[11]

Next in Ibn Isḥāq’s narrative comes the story of the enigmatic *siwāk.* Muḥammad was nearly speechless and perhaps still struggling with a severe ulcer in his lungs when he looked longingly at a toothpick, or *siwāk.* ‘Ā’isha asked him if he wanted it. He said, “Yes.” So she chewed on the toothpick to make it softer and then gave it to him. The Prophet took it and proceeded to polish his teeth more vigorously than ever before. As soon as he finished this act of dental hygiene, ‘Ā’isha felt his weight fall on her bosom and noted the glaze in his eyes. His last words were, “But the most exalted companion is of paradise.”[12]

Thus ended Muḥammad’s life, according to an account that must rank as the least inspired in the annals of the deaths of prophets and saints. Why should Ibn Isḥāq have bothered to commemorate and seal the momentous life of the Prophet with something so trivial as the chewing of a toothpick? Literary critics might suspect his plan was to give the religious narrative a sense of verisimilitude, a certain tangibility that only such casual details could provide.[13] But this episode, like others in the Prophet’s life, has a specific meaning that could be understood only by insiders already familiar with the symbolic code. The toothpick, Ibn Isḥāq tells us, was provided by someone from the family of Abī Bakr, the first rightful caliph, and it was salivated over by ‘Ā’isha, the favorite wife, thus bonding them with the Prophet at the moment of his death and beyond. Moreover, Muslim tradition would remember that Muḥammad polished his teeth every morning and evening as an integral part of his preparations for prayer.[14] Used with more pathos than passion, the toothpick stood as a symbol of ritual purity unto death.

After the tooth-cleaning episode, did ‘Ā’isha help in the washing of

Muḥammad's corpse in her bedroom? No one knows. What matters is the perception that 'Ā'isha and the other wives did not, in the end, play any role in preparing their husband's corpse for burial. The "fact" that they did not wash his corpse was significant for Ibn Isḥāq and his audience, as we can deduce from a key piece of evidence censored from Ibn Isḥāq's biography in the standard edition by Ibn Hishām (d. ca. 830), a Baṣran man who died in Fusṭāṭ. In a different account, the historian al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) reported on the authority of Salama (ibn al-Faḍl, d. 806), who heard Ibn Isḥāq's lectures in Rayy, the original conclusion to 'Ā'isha's narrative. After God cast sleep upon the men and an unknown speaker revealed that the Prophet should be washed in his shirt, 'Ā'isha said, "Had I known at the beginning of the affair what I knew at the end, no one other than his wives would have washed God's Messenger." This oral tradition appears in other sources as well, associated in the first four links of the chain with oral transmitters from Medina. It recalls with regret and some bitterness the events surrounding the washing of the prophet Muḥammad's corpse. Instead of revealing political tension between Abū Bakr and 'Alī, it suggests social tension between Muḥammad's wives and the group of men who undertook the ritual.[15]

In lecturing about the Prophet's life, Ibn Isḥāq needed to provide a dignified portrait of Muḥammad that would also serve as a model for ordinary Muslims. The Qur'ān insisted that all prophets were only human and pietists emphasized the importance of imitating Muḥammad. Nevertheless, the representation of everyday reality in the life of a holy personage carried certain risks. An ordinary event or a trivial prop could easily be sacralized through association with the holy, but it was essential to preserve a delicate balance between prophet and everyman, so as not to humble or debase Muḥammad merely for the sake of a ritual exemplum.

Christian hagiographers had been equally fond of representing the everyday life of holy men, yet they had done so with vestiges of classical restraint. Even in the sensual late antique biographies of eastern saints, they kept many areas of everyday life in shadow. A sickness unto death marked these characters in the most physical way. We can all too easily visualize the sores of their feet, the drag of mortified flesh. Yet their lives were but sketches that communicated the essence of character and its message without prosaic detail. No need was perceived for a legalistic depiction of every aspect of the lives of John of Ephesus, Simon the Stylite, or other saints.[16] Even the Biblical descriptions of the burial of Christ and of Old Testament patriarchs did not serve, in late antiquity, as a legal model for Christians.[17] The monks living at the edge of the desert were to be imitated in a general way—occasionally down to the theatrical details

—but not followed to the letter by townsmen. Theirs was a set of lives, not a code of rules. In the early Islamic period, by contrast, there reigned the idea that Muḥammad’s single light should shine even on the most mundane aspects of daily life in the city. The literary consequence of this ideal is an arabesque biography that reveals far too much about the concerns of Ibn Isḥāq, his informants, and his audience, even if it reveals nothing at all about the historical Muḥammad.

Though deeply concerned about everyday practices, Ibn Isḥāq’s *Life of Muḥammad is* not, strictly speaking, a book of law. The *Sīra,* as the biography is entitled, does not address systematically, as Ibn Isḥāq’s lost *Sunan* might have, questions about the applicability of Muḥammad’s example. It reveals, for instance, that Muḥammad was not stripped naked, yet it does not clarify whether or not this event established a new paradigm for corpse washing. Still, it is important to remember that Ibn Isḥāq was an authority on Islamic law. This expertise colored his biography. Furthermore, his most attentive audience consisted of legal-minded Muslims from cities of Mesopotamia and Khurasan. Unlike the natives of Medina, the residents of these cities could not take for granted the acceptability of their local practices. Many of them believed fervently that Muslim customs should, as far as possible and down to the last detail, correspond to Muḥammad’s example.[18]

This belief placed pressure on Medinese authorities, such as Ibn Isḥāq and his contemporary, the jurist Mālik (d. 795), to tell anecdotes about Muḥammad that would help extend the *Sharī‘a* into all spheres of daily life in the city. Ibn Isḥāq and Mālik were archrivals. Muḥammad’s biographer apparently boasted, “Present to me the knowledge of Mālik, for I am the man to check it.” In response, Mālik supposedly decried Ibn Isḥāq as the anti-Christ.[19] In a characteristic display of reticence, which will expose Ibn Isḥāq’s glibness, Mālik related only one detail, as we shall see, about the washing of Muḥammad’s corpse. The most important jurist of Medina, he was universally acclaimed as a trustworthy authority. In an endeavor to determine how the men and women of his city washed corpses, let us examine his oral traditions and legal opinions.

Washing Corpses in Medina

Mālik’s book of law, the *Muwaṭṭa’,* includes a prescription concerning ablution of the corpse with sand. This book comes in various recensions that vary from one another in style but not noticeably in substance.[20] Mālik’s pupil Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā al-Laythī the Andalusian

(d. ca. 849) transmitted what has become the standard recension. Reporting on sand ablution, he wrote,

> It was related to me from Mālik that he heard scholars say, “When a woman dies and has with her neither other women to wash her, nor a tabooed kinsman [*dhawu `l-maḥram*], nor a husband to undertake this matter on her behalf, then she is purified by *tayammum.* “Thus, dust is rubbed on her visage and hands. Mālik said, “And when the man perishes, and there are but women with him, he is also to be ritually cleansed by sand.”[21]

Arab nomads, pilgrims, and travelers might have practiced sand ablution of the corpse on those occasions when someone in their company died far from flowing water. Medina itself had water in abundance.[22] Presumably the ruling on sand ablution applied to death in the desert, not in a town. Nevertheless, the knowledgeable authorities whom Mālik quotes do not refer the practice to any such considerations about the availability of water resources during tribal excursions. Instead, they recommend it—or rather, report it as operative—in those cases when one died alone in the company of strangers belonging to the opposite sex.

Their key consideration was the maintenance of social and sexual boundaries. An ordinary washer needed to be either a spouse or someone who could never have been a spouse. Anyone who might have lawfully married the dead, but had not done so, could wash the corpse’s hands and face with sand. The ruling implies that, in ordinary circumstances, a female corpse could be washed by women, regardless of kinship, or by members of the family, male or female. Similarly, a sand barrier separated male corpses from female strangers but not from female relatives. The Medinese, then, largely viewed the washing of the dead as a family affair.[23]

How would Medinese men or women wash the dead? Did they follow the Prophet’s example? Mālik related that the Messenger had been washed while wearing a long shirt (*qamīṣ*).[24] This sounds proper enough, as the shirt would have prevented anyone from gazing at his body. But did the washer insert his or her hand under the garment? Was water simply poured over the clothes to prevent actual contact with Muḥammad’s corpse? And who conducted the ritual, Muḥammad’s wives or his male relatives? All of this is unclear in Mālik’s account, in contrast to Ibn Isḥāq’s. On this basis, we cannot ascertain whether Mālik considered Muḥammad’s case special—a proper form of washing dignifying the corpse of the Prophet by maintaining a sense of distance between washer and corpse—or a model applicable to everyman.

So much for the example of Muḥammad after death. Did Muḥammad not impart lessons on corpse washing over the course of his life? According to Mālik, when Muḥammad’s daughter died, he instructed Umm ‘Aṭiyya al-Anṣāriyya and the women with her thus: “Wash her three times, or five, or more than this with water and ground leaves of the lote-tree. At the end place camphor, at least a small amount of it. When you have finished, notify me.”[25] Muḥammad is here represented as providing the women with flexible guidelines for the washing of his daughter. Perhaps in Mālik’s view, Muḥammad was simply sanctioning a traditional ritual at which the women were already adept. Significantly, Muḥammad is shown as involved tangentially. Although to provide ritual instructions orally he enters the space of the corpse washers (*dakhala ‘alaynā*), he withdraws from the scene, unwilling to observe the women at work.[26] Once they finish the ritual, they call upon him and he donates his waist-wrapper to shroud his daughter’s corpse. If this tradition served Medinese fathers as an example for proper behavior, one would expect them to be involved authoritatively yet not physically in the rite of separation from their daughters. They would experience physical proximity only vicariously, by donating a piece of their clothing. And yet, there is no indication that Mālik considered it inappropriate for Medinese fathers to participate actively in the ritual.

Why was Umm ‘Aṭiyya, a woman unrelated to Muḥammad by marriage or kinship, involved in the event? A commentary on the *Muwaṭṭa’* would identify her as a professional washer of female corpses (*ghāsilat al-mayyitāt*) .[27] Given Medina’s small population (surely no more than ten thousand inhabitants), it is unlikely anyone specialized exclusively in the industry. At any rate, Medina had women with special expertise in the art of cleaning a corpse; they could assist the women of the household in the ritual.

A brief comment about the ground leaves of the lote-tree (*sidr*) and camphor (*kāfūr*) is in order. Lote-trees grew in the cultivated lands of eastern Arabia, in Hajar, thanks to the abundant water supplied by a rich oasis. The lote-tree figures prominently in the Qur’ānic Paradise, so use of its ground leaves for death rituals is hardly surprising. Camphor, a medicinal substance used to treat skin infections, served also as a rubefacient to restore a body’s ruddy complexion. But did Mālik expect the Medinese to use camphor, a plant that originated in the mountains of India and China? Presumably this product reached eighth-century Medina by way of the Indian Ocean trade. That said, the connection of this tradition to local Medinese practice is tenuous, since it was transmitted to Mālik by Baṣran authorities. At the mouth of the Persian Gulf, Baṣra was strategically located to benefit from the

Indian Ocean trade. Camphor would have been readily available for the use of Baṣran, but not necessarily Medinese, corpse washers.[28]

Mālik concluded with regard to the washing of the dead: “In our milieu, the washing of the dead is not the kind of thing that is described, nor does this have a traditionally recognized form. Nevertheless, one is washed with the result that one is purified.”[29] Thus, in eighth-century Medina, there were many ways to wash a corpse. This variety interested Mālik, but it did not alarm him. Instead of attempting to make the practice uniform, he decided sensibly to sanction multiple forms while maintaining that their aim should be purification.

In Mālik’s age, in Medina, a wife could legitimately wash her husband’s corpse and vice versa. Mālik reported to Yaḥyā on the authority of ‘Abdallāh, the son of caliph Abū Bakr: “Asmā’ bint ‘Umays, the wife of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, washed Abū Bakr when he died. Then she went out [*thumma kharajat*] and asked the Emigrants who were present, ‘I am fasting, and this is a very cold day, so is it my duty to do a major ablution?’ ‘No,’ they replied.”[30] The legal question here is about whether or not a wife needed to purify her body after washing her dead husband. It reveals incidentally, casually, that the ritual occurred indoors, away from the winds and the public eye, and that washer and corpse were related by marriage. This was evidently the normal order of things.

The tradition explicitly demonstrates that there was some anxiety, which the Meccan Emigrants to Medina sought to assuage, about defilement of the living by contact with a corpse. A similar concern about the state of purity of a man’s body after handling the dead is evident in another of Mālik’s traditions. It recollects that ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Umar (d. 693) had entered the mosque to pray, after perfuming the corpse of one of Sa‘īd ibn Zayd’s sons, without bothering to make even the minor ablutions (*thumma dakhala `l-masjid fa-ṣallā wa-lam yatawaḍḍa’*).[31] Remarkably, Mālik recommended neither the ritual ablution before prayer (*wuḍū’*) for the perfumer nor the major ritual ablution (*ghusl*) for the washer. This suggests he may not have considered the corpse as a source of contamination. Evidently, however, these questions about defilement arose because some Muslims suspected that handling a corpse could annul their state of purity. Mālik himself might have felt this anxiety. Ibn al-Qāsim (d. 806) remembered that Mālik had disregarded the tradition of Asmā’ (*wa-lam arahu ya’khudhu bi-ḥadīth Asmā’*). He had maintained instead that the washer ought to bathe his entire body, as after contamination by major impurity (*arā ‘alā man ghassala mayyitan an yaghtasila*). At any rate, legislation aside, he had known that people always purified their bodies after touching corpses (*lam adrik al-nāsa illā ‘ala `l-ghusl*).[32]

So far we have established on the basis of incidental—not explicitly prescriptive—statements that there was nothing extraordinary in spousal washings in early Islamic Medina. Jointly, the case of sand ablution and the case of ablution on a cold day have revealed that sometimes husbands washed wives and vice versa. They showed that the spouse was one of several potential washers, but was he or she the preferred agent? Ibn al-Qāsim reported on Mālik’s authority “that the wife is the most entitled in the washing of her husband whenever he dies in a civilized region, though there may be at his side men who would wash him, and similarly the husband with respect to his wife.”[33]

Mālik’s legal opinions are suspect as indicators of the social order: often the historian cannot determine whether they sanction an existing condition or endeavor to change it. Explicit rulings on practice (*‘amal*) do not necessarily reflect the everyday order of life in eighth-century Medina, but rather the law sanctioned by Mālik deliberately.[34] This is not the case with casual statements, which have revealed that in Medina, wives washed their husbands indoors. How frequently this practice occurred it is impossible to know. Certainly we must take into consideration the possibility that other actors washed other corpses in other places. Casual statements merely disclose, as if by accident, what was normal, unproblematic, mundane.

The Sexual Boundary in Iraqi Law

As a result of the Arab conquests and the foundation of a new empire, Muslims began to establish their religion outside of its birthplace in Arabia. Jurists dwelling in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Khurasan began wondering about the applicability of Medinese law to the social and religious order of their cities. Medina’s ritual practices usually seemed reasonable, defensible, and worth imitating. Occasionally, as in the case of spousal corpse washing, they appeared strange. Iraqi jurists found disturbing in particular the notion of a husband washing the body of his deceased wife.

The version of Mālik’s *Muwaṭṭa’* by the Kūfan jurist al-Shaybānī (d. 805) is an earlier, more discursive account of the teachings of the master of Medina than Yaḥyā‘s canonical version. It includes a section entitled “The Chapter on the Woman Who Washes Her Husband.” In it, al-Shaybānī narrates the tradition about the dispensation Asmā’ obtained from washing herself on that cold day when she had washed her husband’s corpse while fasting. From this tradition al-Shaybānī draws two lessons. First, there is absolutely no problem (*lā ba’sa*) should a woman wash her husband when he dies. Second, neither the major (*ghusl*) nor the minor ritual ablution (*wuḍū’*) is incumbent upon the washer unless he (or she) is struck by anything from that water, in which case he (or she) should really wash it off.[35]

That the oral tradition of Asmā’ had become noteworthy for its implicit content is clear from the title under which it was categorized by al-Shaybānī. (Yaḥyā the Andalusian, by contrast, grouped this tradition with several others, all given without comment—nor hint of disagreement—under the general rubric “What Was Mentioned About the Washing of the Dead.”) The tradition emerged to resolve a question about the necessity of ritual purification after handling a corpse. In the first of the Kūfan jurist’s lessons, we find the tradition adduced in a different context, in order to resolve a social issue. Here we observe a legal-minded traditionist at work—a mind at once reluctant to fabricate a prophetic saying to support a given position, yet one willing to interpret an existing saying in order to address a new concern. For the historian, the disjunction between the oral tradition and its legal interpretation offers remarkable evidence of a shift in attitudes. In its original form, the tradition showed preoccupation with a corpse washer’s state of purity and with the hardship of performing a major ablution. In al-Shaybānī’s treatment of it, the tradition betrays a new concern about the permissibility of wives washing dead husbands, despite the fact that the practice is declared unproblematic.

A commentary on Mālik’s teachings by the Kairouanese jurist Saḥnūn (d. 855) contains a chapter with the title “The Man’s Washing of His Wife, and the Woman’s of Her Husband.” Here we find a series of questions that Ibn al-Qāsim claimed to have posed Mālik. The beginning will sound familiar.

> I asked him [Mālik] about the man who washes his wife in a civilized region [*fi `l-ḥaḍar*], although there are with him women who would wash her. He replied, “Yes, [that is fine].” I inquired, “And can the woman wash her husband while nearby there are men?” “Yes,” he replied. I continued, “Should each of them cover the pudendum of his [or her] partner [*‘awrat ṣāḥibihi*]?” He said, “Yes.” I asked, “And each one acts as one does with the dead, for one covers the genitals [*furūj*] of the dead?” He replied, “Yes, each one of the couple does to his partner as one does to the dead, covering the spouse’s area of shame” [*‘awra*].[36]

Note the shift in the terms and character of the discussion. To perform the sand ablution on a husband or a wife in case of need, during a journey (*fī safar*), seemed acceptable to the inquirer. But why, he wondered, should husband or wife perform the ablution of the corpse in an urban environment, where washers of the same sex as the dead were readily available? Evidently he stemmed from a society where spousal washings were not taken for granted. Why, otherwise, would he have asked Mālik if spouses wash each other “as one does with the dead”? Perhaps he worried that a Medinese spouse might wash the dead differently, without veiling the sexual zone of shame. Ibn al-Qāsim conveyed Mālik’s reassuring response on this count. But not all of Mālik’s exponents felt the need to sanitize the Medinese ritual. Contradicting Ibn al-Qāsim, ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ḥabīb (d. 852) declared without apology that “one member of the couple washes his or her partner; the dead one is naked without [there being any] need [for this].”[37]

Mālik had illustrated the details of washing corpses in broad strokes. Ibn al-Qāsim would remember this flexibility yet also relate a ritual detail missing from the *Muwaṭṭa’* in Yaḥyā’s recension.

> And Mālik ibn Anas said, “Regarding the washing of the dead, there is no restrictive, divine ordinance [*ḥadd*]. They wash and they purify. …” A rag [*khirqah*] is placed upon the pudendum [*‘awra*] of the dead. When they desired to wash him, and the one who washes him reaches with his hand toward the genitals [*farj*], if there was a need for this, [then] he is to place on his hand a rag. When he reaches the genitals with it, even if he needs to relinquish the rag and to touch the genital region directly with his hand, he does so. All of this is within his powers.[38]

Given his general stance that there are various acceptable ways of washing the dead, Mālik would have been reluctant to discuss the ritual in such detail. Outside of Medina, however, jurists felt a need to define Mālik’s teaching precisely. They asked very specific questions, and in the process, they extended the legal dialogue to cover new issues.

Missing from the *Muwaṭṭa’* in Yaḥyā’s recension are explicit references to the controversies Mālik had faced. One needs to read the *Kitāb al-Umm* by the jurist al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 820) to discover that someone had faulted Mālik (*‘āba baḍu `l-nāṣ hādha `l-qawl ‘alā Mālik*) for refusing to impose a proper boundary (*ḥadd*) to specify both the minimal and maximal number of washings. This refers us back to the *ḥadīth* featuring Umm ‘Aṭiyya, and to Mālik’s view that the ultimate purpose of the ritual is cleaning, no matter if it should take three, five, or however many washings. “God be praised!” exclaimed the anonymous objector, “How could the people of Medina not know the washing of the dead, when the oral traditions about it are multiple?” He then adduced oral traditions (unfortunately not quoted) from the Kūfan Ibrāhīm (al-Nakha‘ī, d. 715) and the Baṣran Ibn Sīrīn (d. 728).

Defending himself, Mālik replied:

> Someone washed another in such-and-such a way and declared, “A fellow is to be washed in such-and-such a way.” So, then, we deemed this proper—but God knows better—depending on what was available to them with which to wash the dead and [what was required to accomplish] cleansing. [We also took into consideration] the disparity [in the condition of] corpses, the diversity of situations, and what is possible or impractical for the washers. So Mālik gave a general statement, “One is washed, with the result that one is cleansed [*fa-yunaqqā*] .”[39]

Mālik’s argument, then, is that the religious law cannot be based on the particular way that any given person might wash the dead on a specific occasion. Out of consideration for the variety of circumstances to which the washer might need to adapt, Mālik refused to issue precise ritual directions.

Beyond this divergence between Medinese and Iraqi jurists concerning the desirability of issuing laws to delimit the number of corpse washings, there was controversy also over spousal corpse washings. Legal divergence over this ritual might have originated in the early eighth century, around the time of Mālik’s birth. According to Suwayd al-Ḥadathānī (d. 854), Mālik said that Jābir ibn Zayd (d. ca. 714), a pietist from southeastern Arabia who became a leader of the Ibāḍi Khārijites in Baṣra, “decreed in his last testament that his wife Amīna wash him.” He was admonished, “A woman will wash you!” He insisted, “She has more of a right to my genitals” (*hiya aḥaqqu bi-farjī*). Here we find Mālik implicitly defending a husband’s right to designate his wife as corpse washer. That this right had become controversial is evident. It is surprising, nonetheless, to find Mālik adducing this case against his antagonists, presumably proto-Sunni Baṣrans opposed to the Khārijite schismatic.[40]

Al-Shāfiʿī’s *Kitāb al-Umm* preserved in an unlikely place the record of a legalistic debate about the problem of spousal washing. Al-Shāfiʿī does not figure prominently in the dialogue, tagged sloppily to the chapter on the controversy regarding the insertion of the dead into the grave.[41] It reads as a debate initiated after a lecture by a student provocateur who claims that a wife has the right to wash her husband’s corpse but not vice versa. The others ask: Why do you differentiate between them? Had Abū Bakr not willed that his wife Asmā’ wash his corpse, as had Fāṭima that her husband ʿAlī wash her corpse? Yet there is a difference, the provocateur responds, in that a surviving woman observes the *ʿidda,* a prescribed period of widowhood, whereas a surviving husband, entitled to four wives, may replace one wife immediately after her death with another. *ʻIdda* refers to the period of waiting, lasting four months and ten days, during which widows and divorced women cannot remarry. It served women to ascertain whether or not they carried a child from the deceased or divorced husband, and it functioned in part as an official time of mourning during which wives were prevented from using jewelry and perfume, symbols of eligibility. By contrast, bereft husbands did not enter into a legally prescribed period of mourning and separation. Upon dying, continues the provocateur, a woman leaves the jurisdiction of the living (*fāraqat ḥukm al-ḥayāh*) and becomes as if she had never been a wife (*lam takun zawjatan qaṭṭu*). A dead man, on the other hand, remains bound to his surviving wife for at least four months and ten days, and potentially longer, if during her period of waiting the widow discovers she is pregnant with his child. A husband and a wife, according to this view on marriage, remain legally connected after death only if the husband dies first.

As the debate deepens, it comes to consider a parallel between the legal status of a woman divorced with the right to return to her husband, should he allow it, and that of a woman bereft. If this kind of divorcée carries the man's child and he dies, can she wash his corpse? Could she touch his genitals as she used to before the divorce? These questions stemmed from the ambivalent referent of the category *ʻidda,* applicable indiscriminately to widows and divorced women in order to prevent them from contracting sexual relations and having children of unknown fathers. Under this system emphasizing patrilineal descent, the bond between husband and wife survives death primarily by the production of offspring. For this reason, the jurists who debated the question of spousal washing also wondered whether the slave girl who had produced for the master a son (*umm al-walad*) had a right to wash her owner's corpse. Those in favor argued that such a slave girl possessed the same rights as a wife with respect to touching, gazing, and sexual enjoyment. (This last prerogative, *istimtāʻ,* refers to sensual pleasure with the master's body before his death.) Those against the ritual held that a childbearing slave girl attains her emancipation (*ʻitq*) with the master's death; she thereby loses the connection (ʻ*ulqa*) to him that an inheritance would entail.[42]

Key in the debate was the question of reciprocity in marriage. Thus, the side arguing against the provocateur asserted that the matter of widowhood had nothing to do with the issue of spousal washing, for husband and wife are considered equal (*sawāʼ*) with regard to the marriage contract (*ʻaqd al-nikāḥ*). A husband, in other words, should not be denied a ritual of separation permitted to the wife. Now, nearly all jurists agreed that in the absence of males a wife had the right to prepare her husband’s corpse for burial in one fashion or another. The abiding example of the Medinese ancestors, as well as the notion of the wife as the bearer of man’s off spring, ensured the ritual’s legality. Far more problematic was the idea that a husband was equally entitled to wash his wife’s corpse. He could not claim a legal connection to his wife after her death on the basis of *‘idda,* because this prescribed period of widowhood applied only to surviving wives. In addition, since, as we shall see, the female body had a more extended zone of shame, it needed additional protection from members of the opposite sex. Therefore, it seemed from this perspective undesirable for a husband to wash the private zone of a female body from which by death he had become estranged.

The jurists who opposed the washing of a wife’s corpse by her husband did so notwithstanding the example of the venerable ‘Alī, who had by some accounts washed his wife Fāṭima. They also disregarded a Medinese tradition that held that Muḥammad, on his deathbed, had promised ‘Ā’isha to “wash her, shroud her, pray for her, and bury her” were she to die before him. “I can [so imagine] myself with you!” exclaimed ‘Ā’isha. “Were you to do this,” she teased after the rite, “you would return to my bedroom and alight for a rest in it with one of your wives.”[43]

The *Kitāb al-Umm* does not identify the provocateur who initiated the entire discussion by claiming that the husband did not have the right to wash his wife’s body. Elsewhere, his position is attributed to Kūfan jurists, most notably to Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 778). At hand we have a fascinating example of Kūfan divergence from the Medinese stand that husbands are more entitled than others to perform this ritual. Jurists from other cities, such as the Damascene al-Awzā‘ī (d. 774), tended to blend Medinese and Kūfan arguments to favor a compromise allowing husbands to wash deceased wives or to absolve them with sand in the absence of women. Distinctions may also be drawn with reference to schools of law. Following the teachings of the founders, Mālikites and Ḥanafites grew polarized on the right of husbands to wash dead wives. Shāfi‘ites and Ḥanbalites adopted intermediate positions: they did not declare the ritual interdicted (*muḥarram*), yet approved of it only out of necessity (*ḍarūra*) because of disagreement (*khilāf*) and doubt (*shubha*) about it.[44]

Twelver Shī‘ites felt compelled to defend the washing of a dead wife. One Shī‘ite asked another, “Who washed Fāṭima?” When informed that it had been the Commander of the Faithful, her husband ‘Alī, the inquirer showed signs of anguish until his informant reassured him, “Do not sink into dejection, for she was indeed a righteous woman who could have been washed only by a righteous man. Have you not learned that no one other than Jesus washed Mary?” Even though it was not mentioned in the Gospel, Jesus’s act with his mother helped Shī‘ites uphold the lawfulness (*jawāz*) of spousal washings. They in fact ruled that the husband was more entitled than any other man to wash his wife.[45] However, they restricted this practice to extraordinary circumstances. A man confronted on a journey by the corpse of his wife or of a tabooed female relative was allowed, in the absence of other women, to pour water over her chemise. But he could not look upon her pudendum, and he was expected to keep her hair and other personal charms veiled. Even this impersonal form of washing, so detached and innocuous, was forbidden to him in case of zeal (*ta‘aṣṣub*) on the part of the woman’s kinsmen.[46] Shī‘ites considered the moment of death less divisive for spouses than did Ḥanafites. Nevertheless, their anxious and apologetic tone suggests they faced taunts. Perhaps Kūfan Ḥanafites mocked Kūfan Shī‘ites when they questioned the merit, if not the legality, of ‘Alī’s action with his deceased wife.

Iraqi jurists did not formally oppose the ritual of wives washing dead husbands because, as we have seen, wives remained legally connected to their husbands for several months after death. They had to contend, in addition, with the powerful example of Abū Bakr, who had commanded amidst the Emigrants and the Helpers that his wife Asmā’ wash his corpse. To imitate him and venerable ancestors (*muqallidīna li-salafinā*) in the practice of wives washing husbands seemed justifiable, particularly as caliph Abī Bakr knew best what was permitted and what was prohibited. Nevertheless, despite this precedent, Iraqi jurists generally preferred for men to be washed by men. In their ideal world, the sexual boundary would not be crossed during the preparation of corpses for burial. Al-Shāfi‘ī claimed that “the most entitled (*awlā*) of the people” in the business of washing the dead was the very one who was the “most entitled in praying for him.” Naturally, this would be a man—and preferably one respected for his piety and knowledge.[47]

The legal-minded biographies of Ibn Sa‘d contain many reports about male pietists preparing for burial the bodies of male pietists. The grandson of one of the Baṣran weepers, ‘Abdallāh ibn Mughaffal al-Muzanī, remembered that Abū Barza al-Aslamī (d. ca. 684), ‘Ā’idh ibn ‘Amr, and a few of the Messenger’s Companions had washed his grandfather. Similarly, ‘Alqama, one of the sons of ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Amr al-Muzanī, recalled how Companions of the Prophet had washed his father: “They did not do more than roll up their sleeves. … When they finished washing him, they performed the minor ablution in order to pray”[48] Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī (d. 748), one of the Baṣrans who related oral traditions about the washing of corpses, washed the corpse of one of the authorities he quoted, Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn (d. 728). Ibn Sīrīn himself honored the request of Anas ibn Mālik (d. ca. 711) to prepare his corpse for burial.[49] In this context it is easy to understand why some Baṣran pietists would have been dismayed at Jābir ibn Zayd's choice to be washed by his wife.

Iraqi jurists found reason to be troubled by the crossing of another sexual boundary within the Muslim family. Everyone agreed a mother could wash a boy under seven years of age; she was accustomed to touching his small zone of shame during his upbringing (*fi ḥāl tarbiyatihi*). By contrast, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal considered it presumptuous or abhorrent (*istaʿẓama*) that the Baṣran jurist Abū Qilāba (d. 722) had washed his young daughter's body. Why the discrepancy? Because a little girl's zone of shame is more unseemly (*afḥash*) than a little boy's, and because it was not the custom (*ʿādah*) of fathers to bathe their daughters.[50]

It is significant that the Baṣran Abū Qilāba chose to wash his daughter and that the Baṣran Jābir ibn Zayd chose to be washed by his wife. Their actions show that several Iraqi jurists from the turn of the eighth century did not regard sex as a formidable boundary dividing male and female within the family. We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that these events became controversial. By the late eighth century, on account of Kūfan opposition to the washing of a wife's corpse by her husband, the divide between the sexes grew sharper. Abū Yūsuf (d. 798) drew one of the dividing lines in neat terms, on the authority of Abū Ḥanīfa: "A woman may wash her husband, but a man may not wash his wife."[51] Mothers and wives were still legally entitled, under certain circumstances, to cross the sexual barrier in order to perform the ritual of separation; husbands and fathers found it increasingly prohibitive.

Unlike the jurist of Medina, the jurists and traditionists of the cities of Iraq would delve into minutiae, offering precise instructions on just about everything. This change might be explained partially with reference to the organic development of Islamic law—not on account of any attempt at making legal thought systematic or at reconciling it with the Qur'ān, but simply from the professional drive of jurists to develop ritual laws and influence ritual practices. As Islamic societies became more complex, there were more Muslims willing to spend their time thinking about death rituals. In the most populous cities of the Islamic world, where labor was highly differentiated, jurists and traditionists were sustained in their thoughts but also checked in their ruminations by an urban order that came to include, among other characters, real experts in the art of handling the corpse.[52] At a deeper level, these legal developments were the product of new social concerns about the exposure of the body and the relationship between the sexes. To understand in greater depth how the ritual of washing the corpse changed in the translation from Arabia to Mesopotamia, we must turn now to the beautification of the corpse and then to its acquisition of new religious values.

Beautifying the Body

The Baṣran tradition recorded in Mālik's *Muwaṭṭa'* about the washing of Muḥammad's daughter eventually made it to the ninth-century collections of tradition, where it appears occasionally embellished. In Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad,* for instance, there are at least three new endings to the story, each of which is a variation on the braiding of hair. All three agree on the detail, missing from the *Muwaṭṭa',* that the daughter's hair ended up arranged in three tresses. But they diverge on the nature of the hairdressers' action, leaving it ambiguous whether they had simply placed her hair in three tresses, or had first combed it out and finally braided it. Also, it is unclear how the braids were finally arranged. One version holds that one of the tresses was a forelock, while the others imply all three tresses fell behind.[53]

These ritual details appear transcribed, as it were, on the margins of the oral tradition recorded by Mālik. Ibn Ḥanbal recorded them in the ninth century, after Mālik's death, but they may well have already been circulating orally in the eighth century. Muslim tradition links their transmission to Baṣran authorities, including the Medinese emigrant Umm ʿAṭiyya, Ḥafṣa bint Sīrīn, and her brother, Ibn Sīrīn. Mālik reported the short, braid-less version also on the authority of a Baṣran traditionist, Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī (d. 748). If he heard the braided versions as well, he decided not to transmit them. He revealed to al-Shāfiʿī that someone (presumably a Baṣran traditionist) had clashed with him on the matter of hairdressing corpses. Fearing the irreparable loss of hair that might result from this activity, he said, "the head and the beard of the dead are not to be combed." He also argued in this context "that there is nothing in the washing of the dead that is to be strictly scheduled [by law]." Thus, it was not acceptable in his view to legislate about tresses.[54]

Despite the Medinese jurist's reluctance to issue legal directives, Iraqi traditionists and jurists found cosmetic practices fascinating and decided to consider in detail how to beautify corpses. Al-Shāfiʿī approved of the use of a soft stick to pick at the filth beneath the fingernails, where presumably the devil lodged, and inside the ear. To remove excrement, the stomach was squeezed gently, while incense and candles burned within the washing room. To counter the smells of death, the corpse was perfumed with cotton soaked in camphor, which was applied to the mouth, nostrils, and any deep wounds. Some jurists were averse to the practice of shaving the pubic hair after death. Others found no problem with the application of a depilating lime agent to the pubic region, considering it natural to beautify a corpse as one did a living body. An Ibāḍi Khārijite advised Muslims to treat the dead as they treated patients who had succumbed to a long illness. The spouse of an ill man or woman could shear the pubic hair but not pluck it out.[55]

The potential indignity of the corpse was a matter of serious concern. Bloating had to be prevented. So that the deceased might not lie with his mouth gaping open, corpse washers bound up the jaw with a headcloth. Whenever possible, they closed the mouth and shut the eyes while the corpse was still warm, before the onset of rigor mortis. If they failed to do so, the corpse's visage would turn ugly, and pests (*hawāmm*) would enter through its orifices. They blocked all apertures also for another reason: to prevent the penetration of water into the body. This agent was related to decomposition, a process Muslims did not wish to accelerate. After the tender squeezing of the belly, corpse washers stuffed the bowels with cotton or pure clay. Then, between the cheeks of the buttocks, they gently placed a piece of cotton perfumed with camphor, as if to counter the smell of minor expulsions resulting from the hurried procession of the bier.[56] They spared no efforts in beautifying the corpse, even if this involved fundamentally altering its physical appearance. They subjected hunchbacks to corporal reformation in a vain attempt at straightening (*tamdīd*), by means of bricks and hot water, those bones that would otherwise protrude from the bier. They left an uncircumcised penis in peace if they followed the opinion of the learned; the divergence of some scholars on this matter suggests, however, that some corpse washers circumcised the dead.[57]

Jurists discussed these ritual details without reference to the Qur'ān, which contained no instruction on these matters. On occasion they based themselves on various oral traditions, yet not systematically. Usually they did not justify their ritual laws by the other, contested principles of Islamic jurisprudence—that is, analogy, consensus, or personal opinion. These terms in fact pertain to the rules of legal reasoning as constructed self-consciously by legal theorists and followed all too readily by scholars of Islamic law. They rarely correspond to actual legal reasoning on matters of ritual praxis. Jurists were aware that certain transmitters of oral traditions about beautifying corpses, like Ibn Sīrīn and Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī, had personal experience in these matters. They relied on such men, expert corpse washers, in the making of Islamic law.

Thus, following a description about the placing of clay, brick, or iron on the stomach of the deceased, the jurist al-Shāfi'ī made this disclaimer: “The people with practical knowledge [*ahl al-tajribah*] allege this prevents the belly from growing distended.” They also alleged that placing the corpse on the ground accelerated the process of bloating (*intifāḥ*). For this reason they customarily placed the dead on a bed of planks before proceeding with the washing.[58] How was the jurist reasoning in this instance? Evidently, he was interested in describing the practice of expert washers, while distancing himself from their sort of knowledge and practical reasoning. His goal was to extend the scope of the law into new areas without compromising his evidentiary standards, and to constrain practitioners from changing the norms, everyday manners, and standards of good behavior that were quickly becoming fixed as ritual laws. All of this suggests that Islamic law at its origins was not exclusively reactive but also in part adaptive.

In Medina, the body appeared divided, as the case of sand ablution illustrated, into areas open and closed to the touch of strangers of the opposite sex. The genitals might well have been veiled during corpse washings, and the ritual was probably conducted indoors to prevent exposure of the dead to the public. In the cities of Iraq, the privacy of the corpse came to be even more zealously safeguarded. Iraqi jurists and traditionists introduced new conventions to maintain propriety. They divided the body into sexual zones requiring protection and religious zones demanding appreciation.

Al-Shāfiʿī reported on Mālik’s authority that the prophet Muḥammad had been washed in his long shirt. On this basis, al-Shāfiʿī declared his preference for the washing of a Muslim’s corpse in his long shirt. (Mālik, let us remember, had recorded Muḥammad’s case but without ruling in favor of its application for all Muslims.) “If he is not washed in a long shirt,” al-Shāfiʿī continued, “a delicate garment that would conceal his zone of shame is tossed over the body. He is to be veiled with a cloth, and introduced into a room where no one would see him except for the one administering the washing.” If the shirt happens to be flimsy or thin, it must at the very least cover the region between navel and knees, since this is the shameful part of a man during his lifetime.[59] The person pouring water over the dead should, by these new regulations, lower his gaze from the dead. The washing room should be curtained off, so that no one might see the corpse other than the corpse washer, the applier of musk, and the roller of the corpse. These indispensable actors were entitled to meet the corpse with their glance only momentarily, if they needed to determine what spots still required washing. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal recommended, on the authority of ʿĀ’isha, that a curtain be placed overhead, fearing the dead would expose his private parts to the heavens (*khashyatan an yastaqbila al-samāʾa bi-ʿawratihi*).[60]

A corpse washer following al-Shāfiʿī’s rules would not reach boldly with his hand toward any of the shameful parts (*lā yufḍī ghāsil al-mayyit bi-yadihi ilā shay’in min ‘awratihi*). He would piously protect (*tawaqqā*) other parts of the corpse. He would do little other than pour water over the body, which was kept on an inclined plank. Admittedly, however, some washers applied themselves eagerly to their profession, and since they wished to clean the corpse thoroughly, al-Shāfi’ī considered it wise to provide them with legal instruction. Prepare two rags and tie one of them around your hand. Upon encountering the penis (*madhākīr*) and the area between his legs (*mā bayna rijlayhi*), wash, then discard this rag and bind your hand with the second rag. Perform in this manner every time your hand alights upon these parts, God willing.[61]

Twelver Shī‘ites took a bolder approach to washing corpses. After turning the corpse in a deliberate way, they would reach immediately for the genitals (*farj*). Less concerned than Ibn Ḥanbal about flashing the heavens, the jurist al-Kulaynī allowed washing under a wide-open sky (*fi `l-faḍā’*), so long as the corpse remained veiled.[62] Shī‘ite instructions for the washing of a woman distinguished one woman from another, depending on the condition of her body. A pregnant woman would be washed first in her lower parts, and care would be taken not to agitate her corpse. Her belly would not be squeezed even gently, as was a barren woman’s belly. A Khārijite source similarly distinguished a pregnant woman’s body. It specified how at the conclusion of the ceremony, the corpse washers would bind the woman’s thighs tightly with a piece of cloth, a form of protection granted to all women, never to men.[63]

Legal discourse on washing the corpse was to a certain degree sexually differentiated. Women’s bodies were addressed exclusively in the oral traditions on the braiding of hair. The grooming of the beard concerned but men. Specific reference to male parts (*madhākīr*) was rare. Far more common in this discourse were instructions for the washing of the genitals (*farj*), which applied to both males and females. The *‘awra,* or zone of shame, concerned everyone, though its shamefulness varied according to sexual maturity, social status, and gender, with prepubescent male slaves having the least cause for shame and free adult women the most. A man’s *‘awra* would extend from the navel to the knees, whereas a woman’s might cover most of the body.[64] Generally, in Sunni law the discussion focused on male bodies, with female bodies left to the reader’s analogical imagination: al-Shāfi‘ī simply declared that the washing of women is similar (*shabīh*) to that of men.[65]

Corpse washers were bound to observe the occasional blemish that Muslims anxious about their posthumous reputation were eager to keep private. For this reason, al-Shāfiʿī recommended that the washer be upright and trustworthy in the exercise of his profession (*amīn ʿalā ghuslihi*). Should he find anything that might damage the public impression of a Muslim, he ought to keep it a secret, "for a Muslim ought to hide what is disgusting in another Muslim." Ḥanbalite washers were similarly sworn to discretion about the potential discovery of sources of humiliation (*faḍīḥa*), unless the corpse happened to belong to a heretic or an innovator, in which case disclosing the evil thing from him was in order.[66]

These distinctions between Muslim and heretic raise an important question: Did Muslims represent the washing of corpses as a specifically Islamic ritual or did they endeavor to Islamicize it in any way? They did not view the practice as Islamic in its origins, as they knew that Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians washed corpses before the rise of Islam. They imagined Adam himself had been washed for burial—by angels rather than by his wife Eve. Some knew that Socrates, after speaking of the soul and the spheres for the last time, left to take a bath "so that we do not burden the women with the washing of the dead."[67] Al-Shāfiʿī thought of the ritual as a human custom (*sunna min banī ādam*) applicable to all human beings with the exception of martyrs who died on the battlefield.[68]

So could Muslims wash non-Muslim corpses? An early Meccan jurist, ʿAṭāʾ, held that Muslims should neither wash nor shroud the corpses of infidels, even if bound to them by kinship.[69] But in al-Shāfiʿī's view, there was no problem if a Muslim washed a member of the family who had died as a polytheist. The Prophet's command to ʿAlī with regard to the washing and inhumation of their pagan relative, Abū Ṭālib (d. ca. 619), underscored this sense of the ritual as a human practice rather than an exclusively Islamic act. Indeed, al-Shāfiʿī presented the washing of the corpse in counterpoint to the funeral prayer, a ritual Muslims could perform only for Muslims.[70] The Ḥanafite position resonated with the Shāfiʿite one. In an age when many a Muslim was a first-generation convert to Islam, al-Shaybānī reported it was perfectly acceptable for a Muslim son to wash his infidel father. (Burying such a father was also permitted, though not in the same grave with Muslims.) If Muslims found a dead stranger in one of the garrison cities they had established, or in any Muslim town or village, they would dignify him with a bath. Nevertheless, they did not need to bother with a dead stranger found in an infidel village, unless a circumcised penis or an article of green clothing alerted them to the possibility that the body had belonged to a Muslim.[71]

According to his sons, Ibn Ḥanbal opined that Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian women should not wash deceased Muslim women.[72] A Ḥanbalite book of law represented the washing of the dead as an act of pious devotion (*ta‘abbud*). Because the performance of this cultic ritual (*‘ibāda*) required right intention (*niyya*), this treatise excluded certain categories of persons, such as infidels and madmen, from washing Muslim corpses. The effectiveness of the ritual could be guaranteed only if carried out by a rational Muslim actor (*‘āqil*). He would be able to dispatch the dead from this world in a perfect state of tidiness and grace. He would treat a corpse gently and reverently (*iḥtirāman lahu*), and protect its inviolability (*ḥurma*). Though based on the revealed law (*al-shar‘*), the ritual was grounded in a rational reason (*ma‘qūl*) and had as its practical goal cleaning (*tanẓīf*). A sane Muslim corpse washer, upon noticing that he lacked the preferred shampoo made from lote-tree leaves, would readily substitute it with a marsh mallow concoction. Ḥanbalites would consider the ritual accomplished, despite this substitution, if it was performed by the right kind of washer.[73]

Ḥanbalite jurists drew a significant connection between the ritual of purification for prayer and the practice of washing corpses. According to Ibn al-Qāsim, Mālik had not issued a legal ordinance (*ḥadd*) specifying that one of a fixed number of corpse washings be a minor ablution (*wuḍū’ al-ṣalāh*); this kind of ablution refers to a ritual that would render the body of a Muslim fit for prayer.[74] By contrast, Ibn Ḥanbal proposed that in the first of a series of three or five ablutions, undertakers perform this ritual of purification, as if to get the body of a deceased Muslim ready to pray to God.[75] This Ḥanbalite proposal to begin the ritual of corpse washing by preparing the body for prayer adds a key ingredient to the curious mixture of hygiene and religion. Ḥanbalites would apply scented powder to the groin, the armpits, the folds of the knees, and all other places where filth and dirt accumulated. But over the brow, the palms of the hands, the kneecaps, and the front of the feet, they would rub a perfume of musk; these were the spots of prostration (*mawāḍi‘ al-sujūd*), the most dignified members of the body (*a‘ḍā’ sharīfa*).[76]

Legal discussion on the ablution of the corpse as for prayer, accompanied by references to the performance of the ritual as an act of pious devotion, suggests a process of Islamization. In its essential form, the ritual seemed common to various human groups, Muslim and otherwise. Gradually, however, restrictions emerged to divide Muslim from non-Muslim corpse washers, and the ritual began to acquire a refined Islamic form.

The analysis of a key oral tradition concerning the washing of Muḥammad’s daughter will serve further to illustrate this process. We have already examined several versions of this tradition in the context of beautifying the hair of a deceased woman. But one Baṣran variant spread throughout the Islamic world the news that Umm ‘Aṭiyya had been instructed by Muḥammad, when she was washing his daughter’s corpse, to begin with “the right parts” (*mayāmin*) and “the spots of ritual ablution” (*mawāḍi‘ al-wuḍū’*). To determine with certainty the precise origin of this tradition would be impossible, although Mālik’s Baṣran informant, Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī, figures as a key link in its transmission. It would be superficial and all too convenient to associate its obscure origins with a single personage. If Ayyūb had any agency in this matter, it was probably confined to sanctioning a popular local practice or giving voice to a general concern. At any rate, this extended version of the tradition spread alongside the short version recorded in Mālik’s *Muwaṭṭa’* to Baghdad, Kūfa, Horns, Marw al-Rūdh, and even al-Maṣṣīṣah, on the frontier between the realm of Islam and Byzantium. Yet those claiming that washing ought to begin with the “right parts” and the “spots of ritual ablution” hailed predominantly from Baṣra, where the tradition must have gained currency in the eighth century.[77]

This tradition is important because it suggests how Muslim bodies came to be washed in a unique way not applicable to pagan, Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian bodies. Certain parts of a Muslim’s corpse began to acquire, first in eighth-century Baṣra, then elsewhere, symbolic values accessible only to Muslims. Perhaps with the Baṣran tradition in mind, al-Shāfi‘ī ruled: “Whenever the dead is embalmed, camphor is placed on those parts of his body involved in acts of worship” (*wuḍi‘a `l-kāfūr ‘alā masājidihi*). These bodily parts, such as the knees and the forehead, had earned the marks of pious prostration (*sujūd*).[78] ‘Alī our evidence indicates that this religious topology of the body developed, not anywhere in Arabia during the seventh century, but in a city of Mesopotamia over the course of the eighth century.

Though marked by pious acts of worship, a Muslim’s corpse was nonetheless subjected to *ghusl,* the total ablution needed for purification. Muslims performed this form of washing on various occasions in the course of everyday life, but in particular after sexual intercourse. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī reportedly suggested that the deceased, if contaminated by sperm or menses, should first be washed with the aim of wiping away traces of major impurity. Certain pietists of the garrison cities (*‘ulamā’ al-amṣār*) regarded all deceased persons as if polluted by sperm or menses and therefore in need of an extensive ablution.[79] Since the corpse required this level of cleaning, was it considered impure and could it contaminate corpse handlers? If it defiled others, did it produce a minor impurity requiring a simple ablution (*wuḍū’*) or a major impurity requiring a general ablution (*ghusl)?*

Mālik’s legacy was equivocal in this respect. He had declared: “I prefer the major ablution after washing of the dead, but I do not judge this necessary.” Sunni Muslims would formulate the dogma, ascribed to the great scholar Ibn ‘Abbās (d. ca. 687), that “a Muslim cannot become inherently impure, whether dead or alive” (*al-muslim lā yanjusu ḥayyan wa-lā mayyitan*). It implied, in a funerary context, that a Muslim could apply the embalming perfume (*ḥanūṭ*) or carry a Muslim’s corpse to the grave and not become in any way contaminated; he could proceed directly to offer a funeral prayer without needing to repeat a minor ablution performed before touching the dead.[80]

Ignoring or disregarding Ibn ‘Abbās’ dogma, certain Muslims believed that handling corpses could bring about a state of impurity. Corpse washing, they reasoned, produced defilement more easily than pall bearing, as by performing this labor one would easily get exposed to sullying or disgusting substances. An oral tradition ascribed to Abū Hurayra (d. ca. 678), one of the Prophet’s most famous Companions, captured this distinction neatly: “Whoever washes the dead, let him perform on himself the ablution from major impurities; and whoever bears the dead, let him perform on himself the ablution from minor impurities.”[81] In the first half of the eighth century, jurists from Medina, Mecca, Kūfa, Baṣra, and Damascus circulated reports acknowledging the practice of performing a general ablution after washing the dead. An oral tradition transmitted by or ascribed to the Medinese scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 743) actually represented this practice as part of the *Sunna,* or venerable custom.[82]

In time, influential Sunnis came to reject Abū Hurayra’s tradition, as it implied that deceased Muslims were impure and defiling. Supporting instead Ibn ‘Abbās’s dogma, they affirmed the essential purity of all Muslims, dead or alive. Oral traditions regarding the omission of the major ablution (*tark al-ghusl*) by corpse handlers began to circulate; one of these, supplied by the jurist al-Shāfi‘ī without chains of transmission, urged Muslims not to judge their dead as impure (*lā tundjjisū mawtākum*).[83] An evaluator of traditions who moved from Sijistān to Baṣra, Abī Dā’ūd, actually judged Abī Hurayra’s stipulation “abrogated” (*mansūkh*). According to al-Shaybānī, Abī Ḥanīfa held that contact with the dead does not infringe upon a state of bodily purity. ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Mubārak (d. *797*), a traveling collector of traditions who stemmed from Marw but worked actively in Kūfa, where he apparently became Ḥanafite, adhered strictly to this dogma that Muslims cannot defile. “The one who washes the dead,” he declared, “performs neither the major nor the minor ablution.” A number of jurists, including Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, proposed an intermediate position, recommending for corpse washers at least the minor ablution (*wuḍū’*). However varied, these formulations worked together against the notion that Muslim corpses were somehow impure. Because they emphasized the state of purity of Muslims, rather than that of all human beings and of all human corpses, they served also to distinguish Muslims from others.[84]

Despite this affirmation of the purity of Muslims, Sunnis remained ambivalent about handling corpses. Nowhere does Muslim tradition remember a scene of Muḥammad washing a corpse. Perhaps this omission was strategic, for who would wish to subject the last of the prophets to the mockery of Jews and Magians, with their peculiar sensibilities about corpses? Nevertheless, there does exist one tradition that recalls the Prophet always carried out the major ablution on four occasions: after sex, following a bloody treatment of cupping, before the congregational prayer on Fridays, and after washing the dead. Adhering to Ibn ‘Abbās’s dogma, a Sunni jurist decided not to use this tradition to determine everyday practice (*laysa `l-‘amal ‘alayhi*).[85]

In the course of preparing a body for burial, a corpse washer might easily come into contact with urine, feces, semen, menstrual blood, or other bodily substances. The actions leading to such emissions could affect the state of purity of the deceased in different ways, either nullifying a previous ablution for prayer (*wuḍū’*) or rendering compulsory the performance of a major ablution (*ghusl*). Yet they posed no serious risk of defilement to corpse washers—under the logic of the system of ritual purity as it emerged by the end of the classical period—because such impurities originated in individual acts and could not be transmitted from person to person.[86] Exposure to these substances did produce squeamishness. Al-Shaybānī, as we have seen, expected a person whose hand or body struck something (*shay’*) from the body of the deceased to wash the offending substance away. Nevertheless, he held that closing the eyes of the deceased or washing a corpse did not invalidate an ablution for prayer nor make a full ablution incumbent. A dead Muslim, he clarified, is “purer and cleaner” than a dog, a pig, or a stinking carcass (*jīfa*), things categorized as essentially impure (*najis*) yet that were, even so, incapable of altering a Muslim’s state of ritual purity.[87]

Narrating oral traditions, Kūfan authorities associated the ritual of thoroughly washing one’s body after handling corpses with the partisans of ‘Alī. The partisans of ‘Abdallāh (ibn Mas‘ūd), they remarked, merely conducted a minor ablution. Now, Ibn Mas‘ūd (d. ca. 652) is known for possessing a codex of the Qur’ān that contained formulations, missing from the ‘Uthmānic recension, indicating approval of ‘Alī. Despite this common ground, he became the emblem of an incipient Sunni legal tradition, concieved in opposition to doctrines and practices that came to symbolize, over time, Shi’ism. These traditions suggest that in Kūfa the factions, which gradually developed into sects, began to approach the dead differently.[88]

Shīʿites actually espoused a position quite distinct from the dominant Sunni one, for they considered the human corpse as impure in its essence (*najis*), in the same category as carrion, wine, and pigs. Contact with the unclean things of this order did not necessitate either of the two standard rituals of purification; all that was required of a person handling dead matter thus classified was physically to remove the impure substance from his body or clothing. In this regard, Shīʿites distinguished warm from cold bodies and encouraged corpse washers to wash themselves only after touching the latter. Evidently the dissipation of bodily heat, rather than the last breath, marked the transition from a human being to a defiling person.[89]

Shīʿites came to consider the parallel between washing of the dead and washing after sex a great mystery. Both rituals required *ghusl,* the major ablution. So, Shīʿites asked, why are the dead washed as if contaminated by major impurity? In obscure tones, they defined the very sentence of death as occurring due to the expulsion of the sperm (*nuṭfah*) from which one had been created. This death-giving sperm would make its exit from the eye or the mouth, without contaminating the dead body as ordinary sperm. Nevertheless, it was the secret cause behind the ritual washing of the dead as if tarnished by sexual impurity.[90]

Corpses had been living human beings moments before the preparations for burial. This simple fact obligated jurists, Sunni or Shīʿite, to ponder the moral implications of treating them like carrion. Despite their categorization of dead humans as inherently impure, Shīʿites showed at least as much solicitude as Sunnis for the welfare of the dead. They also endeavored to imbue the ritual of washing corpses with an Islamic character: they asked corpse washers to begin the procedure by pivoting the body of the deceased until the eyes should look toward Mecca.[91] In general, Islamic law was concerned less with the effects of the dead on the living than with the effects of the living on the dead. Thus, for instance, the Baṣran jurists al-Ḥasan and Ibn Sīrīn considered it repugnant for menstruating women or for men contaminated by traces of sex to wash corpses. Clearly, they were preoccupied by the possibility of impurity spreading from the living to the dead.[92] This interest in the care of the dead, though widespread, was nowhere more pronounced than in eighth-century Baṣra, home of the oral traditions about braiding a corpse’s hair and washing its right parts. In Baṣra and elsewhere, Muslims designed laws to protect the zones of shame. By keeping private blemishes secret, they sought to safeguard the reputation of coreligionists. By turning the corpse in the direction of Mecca, perfuming the parts of a Muslim's body that had been physically affected by daily genuflections and prostrations, and barring infidels from washing Muslim corpses, they strove to honor their dead not just as human beings, but as Muslims.

Because the living perfumed and dressed corpses, social concerns played a key role in legal discussions. Jurists rigorously examined the qualifications of the living for the performance of these rituals, so as better to serve the dead. "What is your opinion about the following scenario?" al-Shaybānī was asked:

> A [Muslim] man dies during a journey and in his company there are only [Muslim] women and a male infidel. Is it appropriate for them to describe to him how to wash him, then to give him a free hand with the deceased? And similarly, were a [Muslim] woman to die during a journey and with her there would be only [Muslim] men and a female infidel, would it be appropriate for them to describe to her how to wash her, then to give [her] a free hand?[93]

The answer to these two questions was yes. It shows that, in the eyes of this Kūfan jurist, the sexual boundary between male and female mattered more than the religious boundary between Muslim and non-Muslim. The key question to ask is: Was this Iraqi emphasis on sexual division in death rituals original and thus, in a sense, an integral part of the process of Islamization, or did it derive from Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian law?

The Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian Contexts

Having detailed points of divergence between Medinese customs and the ideals of Iraqi pietists, the question arises: Why did Baṣrans and Kūfans stray from the Medinese model? Did they fall under the influence of Jews or Zoroastrians, some of whose notions concerning purity and pollution they ingested as readily as Magian cheese? In Baṣra especially, Jews and Zoroastrians mingled regularly with the tribesmen of Arabia, and surely exposed Muslims to unusual ideas about dead bodies.[94] Notoriously anxious about the dangerous effects of corpses, Jews and Zoroastrians had pondered countless measures to prevent dead matter from polluting their persons and environment. They considered corpses the most powerful source of ritual impurity.

The Levitical laws on purity maintained that corpses alone were capable of polluting persons and objects for a week. The rabbis dedicated most of a tractate of the Mishnah (*Oholot*) to the problem of an olive-size chunk of dead matter contaminating the tent. In one of the major Talmudic tractates, *Mo‘ed Ḳaṭan,* they considered at length the activities of mourners, closely associated with the dead, during the semihallowed festive interval between the first and last days of Passover and Tabernacles. Despite their preoccupation with the infringement of the joyous mood of public celebrations on account of funerals, they prohibited mourners from cutting their hair, washing their clothes, wearing sandals, sleeping on the conjugal bed, and engaging in other ordinary activities of reintegration into the larger community.[95]

Rabbinical notions of purity were not static. The destruction of the Temple rendered many purity laws irrelevant, and a case can be made for the relaxation of a number of strictures over time. Still, rabbinical attitudes remained to some degree rooted in the ancient Levitical framework. The minor Talmudic tractate devoted to mourning practices, *Semaḥot,* serves as a case in point. Of uncertain date, its final redaction took place between the end of the third century and the middle of the eighth century. It illustrates, in any case, a high level of continuity in rabbinical concern with the potential defilement of priests. This tractate places restrictions on the occasions during which a common priest may corrupt himself in order to inhume strangers.[96]

Zoroastrians feared that human carrion would pollute the waters flowing through the world. Their anxiety was such that they made provisions for placing the corpse in the driest corner of the home, in case of rain. Generally they kept their distance even from clippings of hair and nails, inert matter stemming from living bodies and symbolizing, for this reason, death and impurity. The *Vendīdād,* a book of the *Zend-Avesta,* advocates elaborate rituals by which kin and corpse bearers might purify themselves after inevitable or accidental contact with the dead. It provides countless instructions to help the living restore their bodies to the original state: “Thou shalt sprinkle the right nipple, then the *Druj i-Nasush* [the Corpse Demoness] rushes upon the left nipple.” Consecrated and unconsecrated bull’s urine served as the key agents applied to help the living recover their purity and a touch of immortality. Like their Jewish counterparts, Zoroastrian priests kept their distance from dead matter. Professional corpse bearers had a low status in the Zoroastrian community, and often lived in segregation. In medieval Iran, non-Zoroastrians were sometimes recruited to dispose of a corpse.[97]

Due to their perception of corpses as sources of impurity, Jews and Zoroastrians did everything possible to remove the dead from the quarters of the living. In Central Asia during the Bronze Age, Zoroastrians had interred the dead in vacated, uninhabited buildings. By the sixth century BCE, they began to use the *dakhma,* a funerary tower, where they exposed the dead to the vultures that spiraled down beyond the city limits.[98] The Jews also erected boundaries to separate the living and the dead. In Biblical times, there existed a prohibition against intramural inhumation, applicable to all but royalty. Normally, until Talmudic times, the Jews buried the dead not in individual tombs in cemeteries but in family sepulchers. These burial sites, located either in caves or in the earth, were marked by a whitewashed stone that served as a warning sign against the risk of defilement. Jews did begin to use cemeteries before the rise of Islam, yet the rabbis warned that these gravesites should be located at least fifty cubits from the nearest house.[99]

In Medina, Baṣra, and elsewhere in the Islamic world, Muslim jurists worried about the corruptive powers of dead matter, although not in the extreme Judeo-Zoroastrian fashion. Medina had perhaps the most stringent norms regulating the handling of corpses. It was customary there for corpse washers to perform the major ablution and for pallbearers to perform the minor ablution. But not everybody felt obligated to act according to these standards: Ibn ‘Umar prayed at the mosque without purifying his body after touching a dead man; Asmā’ obtained a dispensation from performing a major ablution while fasting on a cold day. Their behavior established, in law if not in practice, precedents that could serve to justify a relaxation of earlier Medinese strictures. Mālik declined to make of these exceptional acts new norms. Yet he may well have considered them defensible because, though he explained that in Medina men and women normally undertook rituals of purification after handling the dead, he did not rule that these customary ablutions should be required by law. Mālik’s code of law thus upholds, in this case, attenuated Medinese norms.

This Medinese code can be described, also, as a mitigated version of Judeo-Zoroastrian restrictions. Jewish and Zoroastrian lawmakers sought to protect sacred places and the priestly class from impure corpses. Without backing the Judeo-Zoroastrian notion that corpses defiled, Mālik tried to support the Medinese custom of purifying the body after preparing a corpse for burial. Nevertheless, the differences between his code and the Judeo-Zoroastrian system are more striking than the similarities. This code lacks all the restrictions on purity pertaining to a priestly class. It contains no regulations designed to isolate corpse handlers from the community, nor elaborate rules to purge and segregate close kin and mourners. And, while Jewish and Zoroastrian priestly laws demanded that corpses be buried or exposed outside of inhabited areas, in Medina, as in other cities, Muslims often buried their dead in town—and sometimes even at home.[100] If Medinese rules thus appear as diluted versions of Judeo-Zoroastrian regulations, the Baṣran and Kūfan lifting of all formal, legal restrictions on corpse handlers appears as a deliberate inversion of the entire

Judeo-Zoroastrian system. In the cities of Iraq, Sunni jurists abrogated in one stroke all Jewish and Zoroastrian laws pertaining to the rituals of purity that human beings must undertake after touching corpses.

The unique focus of their laws was on the rites by which the living ought to purify the dead. Before consigning the dead to the earth or exposing them to four-eyed dogs and vultures, Jews and Zoroastrians did of course prepare their corpses for burial; they prayed for them and anointed them with wine and spices. Yet Jewish and Zoroastrian legal tractates do not contain extensive discussions on how to perform these rituals. Typically we learn about them by way of indirect reference. Thus, for instance, facets of the Zoroastrian ritual emerge only through discussions on the conditions for touching a body once it has fallen under the corrupting powers of the Corpse Demoness.[101] Similarly, the Talmud did not seek to define how precisely to wash and anoint a corpse: we know these practices were conducted because the rabbis mentioned them in the course of their discussion on the types of labor permitted during the Sabbath.[102] The odd thing, then, is that in Mesopotamia Islamic law came to be as preoccupied with dispatching the dead in a state of purity as had been Jewish and Zoroastrian laws with restoring a state of purity to the living after defilement by means of contact with the dead.

The cleavage appears most pronounced when comparing Muslim and Zoroastrian notions. Arguably, the "gradual decline" of the Zoroastrian community as a consequence of the Arab conquest of the Sasanian empire "contributed to the gradual erosion of [the ancient] purification rites."[103] Eventually, this process would have distanced Zoroastrian adherents from the strictest Magian ideals and brought them somewhat closer to Muslim ways. Yet Muslim and Zoroastrian notions remained extremely opposed insofar as human corpses were concerned. In fact, it is likely that the Iraqi dogma that "a Muslim cannot become inherently impure, whether dead or alive" developed in polemical reaction to Zoroastrian beliefs.[104] Certainly, at some point or other Muslims became keenly aware of the points of difference. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Thaʿālibī (d. 1038) remarked that Zoroaster "proscribed the touching of dead bodies and claimed that touching [a corpse] necessitates full ablutions [*ghusl*]."[105] Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 1230), a famous author of Sufi legends, included in his memorials of the saints a fascinating story about al-Ḥasan of Baṣra convincing a fire worshipper of seventy years to convert on his deathbed. The Magian finds the Muslim saint persuasive, as a result of which he pleads: "When I die, bid them wash me, then commit me to the earth with your own hands, and place this document [attesting to my conversion] in my hand."[106] The moral lesson was that deathbed conversion to Islam alongside burial in the Muslim style could save even a penitent

Zoroastrian from the fire. Medieval Zoroastrians countered by dismissing non-Zoroastrians as “not naturally fit for observing the precautions about carrion.” Furthermore, they regarded “persons of other faiths who polluted earth, water, or fire through funerary practices” as hell-bound individuals “who are not of good religion.”[107]

We can now appreciate the significance that Baṣran attitudes had in a sectarian religious environment, where the handling of corpses was a divisive issue pitting Muslim against Magian. Baṣrans had found repugnant the washing of corpses by men or women contaminated by semen or menses. They in fact considered it an honor to wash the blessed corpses of fellow pietists. Unlike Jews and Zoroastrians, Baṣran Muslims regarded disposal of the dead not as a “problem” but as an “opportunity.”[108] In their eyes, handling corpses led not to social exclusion but to social distinction.

Consider in this light the Baṣran traditions on braiding hair and on perfuming the parts of the body engaged in acts of worship. They likely emerged in reaction to Zoroastrian notions, perhaps under the influence of a Christian sensibility.[109] Christians held a high economic status in early Islamic Baṣra and were highly respected by local Muslims.[110] And we know that eastern Christians washed and anointed their corpses in solace and with care, though unlike Muslims they did not consider the custom as necessary and canonically prescribed.[111] Frequently, they described the ritual ablution in hagiographies as a fitting culmination of a saint’s life, whose dead body would invariably emit an exquisite fragrance, miraculously even before the embalming. The significance of the ritual may be appreciated with reference to a warning issued by St. Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 389). Exhorting “the people to receive the sacrament of baptism while its grace can reach the innermost recesses of the soul,” he admonished “against deferring it until the body is being washed for its funeral.” Though in Gregory’s view a postmortem baptism was not nearly as efficacious as a deathbed baptism, still he drew a close connection between baptism and death. Describing “a rite peculiar to the Eastern church of his time,” which involved “the kiss of peace bestowed upon the corpse during the service in the Church,” Pseudo-Dionysius compared the pouring of oil on the deceased by the priest to a baptismal anointing. If a baptism before death signified “a challenge to take up the sacred warfare of life,” this baptism after death celebrated the heroic end of life’s struggles in a state of perfection.[112]

Philippe Ariès has argued that a remarkable transition occurred during the first few centuries of the common era, as Christians overcame, first in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean and only later in Europe, the “old repugnance” to contact with the dead. They accomplished this feat, he suggested, “through faith in the resurrection of the body, combined with worship of the ancient martyrs and their tombs." This shift in *mentalité,* the taming of death, accompanied a transformation in burial practices, so that Christians broke the ancient taboos and began to bury their dead inside churches and within city walls. The late antique cult of the saints, which involved exhuming saints' bodies, dismembering them, transporting their bones, and touching and even kissing fragments of the body to be resurrected, provides a compelling vision of this great transformation. A barrier separated this world and the next, but it was "frequently broken" at monasteries and at saints' tombs, as Peter Brown has shown, by dreamy-eyed Christians who found "precious cracks in the wall." Indeed, in the Mediterranean world of late antiquity and the early middle ages, Christians moved imaginatively and with wondrous ease from the realm of the living to that of the dead.[113]

The zeal with which Christians handled the fragments of saints could never have inspired the Muslims of Baṣra, who appreciated the human body as a whole and believed in a close connection between body and soul even beyond the moment of death. Yet in other ways they built, as if by Christian inspiration, upon this late antique foundation. They overcame pharisaical obsessions with the impurity of corpses and grew extremely comfortable handling them, assured by the belief that pure Muslims cannot defile.

Muslims arrived on the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian scene at a time when Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians had already elaborated complex belief systems. Under these circumstances, one cannot reasonably expect early Islamic law to be altogether new. Yet, in one respect, Kūfan jurists appear strikingly original. Their arguments against Mālik regarding the handling of a deceased spouse's corpse mark a significant departure from Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian notions. The closest parallel to be found is an isolated passage in the minor Talmudic tractate devoted to mourning. *Semaḥot* specifies: "A man may shroud and gird the corpse of a man, but not that of a woman. A woman may shroud and gird the corpse of a man or of a woman." Apparently "man" and "woman" does not refer here to husband and wife. Elsewhere *Semaḥot* rules that a priest is required to defile himself for his father and mother, his son and daughter, his brother and sister, and his wife.[114] In the Jewish view, as in the Medinese Muslim view, the preparation of corpses for burial was by and large a family affair, frequently conducted by women but also by men, regardless of the sex of the deceased. The sexual boundary could be crossed even by priests anxious about impurity, though only on behalf of wives and close female kin. What the passage from *Semaḥot* indicates is that a barrier existed between a living male and a deceased female from outside the family circle.

Kūfan jurists extended this barrier dividing a man from a woman to the family sphere. Regarding the human body as a magnet sharply polarized by erogenous and religious charges, they sought to minimize the potential for shock that might result from cross-gender ablutions. Iraqi jurists likely began discussing the right manner of washing corpses because of their social concerns about the violation of the sexual boundary. In Baṣra, Arab conquerors and their descendants mingled with Jewish and Magian women, not to mention Zoṭṭ Indians and the black Zanj, the Sayābiga Malaisians, and the indigenous “Nabateans,” often converting and marrying them.[115] Kūfa has also been described as a melting pot, bringing together Yemenite and Ḥijāzi tribes, Bedouins, as well as non-Arab rural immigrants and Khurasāni soldiers.[116] Perhaps there was an element of distrust in this intermarriage between victors and vanquished. Pious Muslims with an ascetic sensibility began doubting if their lives could be brought to a fitting end by wives who were incapable, even if well-meaning, to handle their dead bodies in the traditional way of the Arabian grandmothers. As they came to question systematically familial ablutions, they also wondered about the proper way to conduct the ritual. A bold vision of ritual change emerged in these cities of Mesopotamia, where Islamic law expanded to cover in depth such novel topics as the protection of a corpse’s zone of shame.

Men enriched by conquest and commerce dominated Baṣran and Kūfan society. Uprooted from various homelands to develop the new Islamic cities, they were perhaps freer than the Medinese to contemplate the formation of an ideal society with different norms, which they would call Islamic. Pondering death and the fate of their bodies, they decided to entrust their corpses to men as honorable and pious as themselves. Should these God-fearing Muslims happen to observe a blemish on the body of a fellow Muslim, they would not gossip about it. Surely they would wash the body respectfully, with an admiring regard for the hard-earned scars of prostration.

CHAPTER THREE

Shrouds

Worldly Possessions in an Economy of Salvation

A celibate ascetic from a Mesopotamian garrison city not unknown for its sweet temptations, ‘Āmir ibn ‘Abd Qays of Baṣra hurried to find the woman on the verge of death who would become his “wife in the Garden” (*imra’atuka fi `l-janna*). This pious woman was the slave girl of evil desert Arabs (*walīda li-a‘rāb sū’*), who reviled and treated her coarsely, fearing her as a source of corruption. She had been accustomed to break her daily fasts with but one flat loaf of bread earned by her work grazing sheep. The second loaf, also received as wages, she used to offer to a family in need. She would die on that very day, sometime in the middle of the seventh century, when the monkish man famous for despising the very idea of marriage rushed to meet her. Following her to the goodly spot (*makān ṣāliḥ*) where she had left the sheep to graze and risen to pray, he inquired, “Do you have a pressing need [*ḥāja*] ?” After some prodding she replied, “I wish there were with me two white garments to serve as my shroud.” For bearing the insults and ill treatment of the family she worked for, she hoped to gain a “reward” in the afterlife (*al-ajr*). ‘Āmir left her behind to obtain permission to administer her burial from the uncouth Arabs who had denied their slave girl a shroud. He returned at the instant she expired with two garments in hand.[1]

This anecdote, recorded about a century and a half after the purported event, offers no hard facts for history. But illustrating more than the character of a man opposed to marriage and worldly goods, it offers a glimpse into the ethos of an economy oriented toward the grave. The Baṣran ascetic deemed it a worthwhile investment to provide decent burial attire to a hungry shepherdess. By connecting him and her in the afterlife, this gift forged a new relationship between a man and a woman. If the charitable deed of giving a shroud helped our ascetic from Baṣra earn a good life in the hereafter, the shroud itself relieved the shepherdess from the shameful prospect of wearing poor clothes to the grave.[2] Procuring for oneself a shroud was the most important preparation a Muslim could undertake for burial. Often in the early Islamic period, individuals bore the expense of their own shrouds. In such a case, relatives would find their inheritance reduced in proportion to the cost of the burial garments. When death came unforeseen, children or parents typically considered themselves responsible for the investment, construed as a debt.

The primary objective of this chapter is to understand the spirit of investments in shrouds. It concentrates on the social and religious value of these objects. In the early Islamic period, shrouds came in a variety of materials and colors, plain or decorated with dancing figures and arabesque patterns.[3] They conveyed personal style, economic status, and ideological commitment. They commemorated a sense of self at a time of personal transformation, signifying aspects of the person one wished to become after death. They also served to create unique material bonds between gift givers and the individuals they dressed for the grave.[4]

Remembering Muḥammad's Shrouds After the Arab Conquests

To gauge early Islamic interest in burial attire, we can begin with the multiplicity of oral traditions about Muḥammad's shrouds. Three white Yemenite garments of Arabian cotton, woven in the town of Saḥūl and imported to Medina by a certain Mu'ādh, may have served as his shrouds. Perhaps, although some denied it as vehemently as others argued for it, the outfit had also included a red mantle (*burd aḥmar / ḥibara*). Possibly, however, Muslims buried the Prophet in an altogether different ensemble consisting of the long undershirt (*qamīṣ*) he had prayed in and worn as he lay dying and two luxurious robes (*ḥullatān*) manufactured by the Christians of Najrān. Yet others would claim with equal conviction that his grave vestments had been white shawls (*riyāṭ*) as well as a loincloth (*izār*) and a turban ('*imāma*)—all woven, no doubt, by the women of Ṣuḥār, a town in southeastern Arabia. A tradition recorded on a scroll of papyrus and attributed to the Medinese Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 742) claims a striped woolen woven garment (*namira qad nusija*) actually served as Muḥammad's shroud. Whatever the fabric and style, the number of shrouds had certainly been three—unless of course it had been seven.[5]

Of the various traditions imagining Muḥammad’s shrouds, none ascribes their origin to Mecca or Medina, the cities of the Prophet. Perhaps this surprising omission was due to the state of the textile industry there both at the time of the Prophet and afterward. Underdeveloped by Iraqi, Syrian, Khurasani, and Egyptian standards, it was also far less advanced than the textile industry of the Yemen, where Arabian cotton (*kursuf*) was grown and spun to produce wide cloaks and turbans.[6] In the environs of Mecca and Medina there appears to have been no cultivation of flax, used for linen fabrics, nor of any kind of cotton.

The Qur’ān does not include the most common term for a shroud, *kafan.* It mentions, however, a garment of foreign manufacture, probably of Byzantine origin, that might have served merchants as burial attire. The Greek *sindón,* from which the Arabicized *sundus* likely derives, designates a fine linen cloth or winding sheet sometimes used to wrap corpses—in other words, a shroud.[7] There exists some evidence in early Arabic poetry attesting to the practice of shrouding amongst Arabs. We see a dying man reflecting as if already dead, “and they clothed me in garments that had not been used.” We sense in this poetry echoes of a deep nomadic bias against settling down, a state of immobility associated with the peace of death and the deadly embrace of shrouds.[8] Nevertheless, it is unclear whether seventh-century Arabs made use of the *sundus* in the burial of Muḥammad and other Muslims.

Nearly all of the traditions about Muḥammad’s shrouds obviously originated after Muḥammad’s death. They reveal a wide gap between memory and reality. The contradictions in these traditions were stark enough that they drove a jurist from Baṣra, Abū Qilāba (d. ca. 722), to ask rhetorically, “Are you not surprised about their divergence from us with respect to the shrouding of God’s Messenger?”[9] It is not obvious who belongs to which party, nor why Muslims found it worthwhile to debate whether Muḥammad had been buried in long white cotton cloaks or in a red mantle. But we may discern two conflicting tendencies, as an ascetic sensibility and a luxurious impulse competed to define Muḥammad’s example.

The preoccupation of Muslim pietists with the matter of shrouds was anything but antiquarian. Roughly one-fifth of those who transmitted or analyzed oral traditions about the Prophet earned their living in the textile industry: Ibn Sīrīn was a draper, Abū Ḥanīfa an exporter of *qazz-silk,* al-Shaybānī a dealer in *ḥarīr-silk.*[10] Muslims regarded these professions in a positive light. “If there was trade in Paradise,” an enthusiast declared, “I would become a cloth merchant there.”[11] Cynics might rush to the conclusion that Muslims’ advocacy for one or another kind of shroud carried with it material benefits: that the commercial enterprises of Kūfan silk merchants and Baṣran cotton weavers exerted a powerful influence on their historical imagination.[12] Apparently this was not the case. Though Baṣrans eventually specialized in garments in the "Yemenite" style (black cotton robes with a red or yellow border of *qazz*-silk), Baṣran religious scholars tended to favor the purity of white shrouds.[13] There is no reason to presume that pietists' investment in these oral traditions was materialistic. Nevertheless, their worldly occupations made them passionate about the subject of Muḥammad's shrouds.

Islam in the postconquests period has been called "a civilization of textiles." Between the late seventh and tenth centuries the relatively unified polity of the Islamic caliphates allowed the progress and diffusion of textile techniques on a scale unprecedented since the Hellenistic period. Raw materials as well as methods of weaving and dyeing that had been to a high degree confined to disparate Byzantine, Coptic, Yemenite, and Persian spheres traveled and spread more easily under Islam.[14] The history of textiles is closely related to, and in fact predicated upon, the history of burial attire, for two reasons. First, burial attire tended to replicate ordinary clothes. The terms used to describe Muḥammad's shrouds are the same as those used for ordinary garments: mantles, turbans, loincloths, and so on. Second, the early Islamic textiles in our possession today by and large derive from the dry burial grounds of Egypt. If historians of textiles have examined these pieces to determine how people dressed in everyday life, what they truly indicate is how people dressed up for the grave.[15]

Thanks to the efforts of specialists to date and localize textiles, we can sketch broad changes over time. They have paid attention to the technique of spinning (Mesopotamian looms produced S-spun/Z-plied linen warps crossed by woolen wefts) and the presence of special dyes (reds from the Mediterranean insect kermes became widespread in Egypt only after the Arab conquests). To date garments, they have also conducted radiocarbon analysis and analyzed the style and content of embroidered inscriptions.[16] To determine geographical origin, they have also considered the availability of raw materials: cotton was extremely rare in the Delta Valley of Lower Egypt, where Copts usually worked with linen yarns, yet prevalent in Mesopotamia.[17]

In the first two centuries after the initial conquests, Islam had a limited influence on the history of textiles. The late antique style of pictorial representation remained for a long while undisturbed by Islamic iconoclasm. In the late fourth century, an industry in Coptic shrouds began to develop in response to a ban on mummification by Theodosius I. These pre-Islamic styles continued to flourish for three centuries after the death of Muḥammad, with the rise of Islam causing no perceptible change. As we endeavor to gain a richer picture of the world of early Islam, it is important to underline this continuity in dress before and after the Arab conquests. A historian has argued that while reading the sources of the Muslim tradition “one is harassed by an exasperating feeling that one cannot *see.”* The “colorful world described by historians of late antiquity” vanishes with the Arab conquests, as we are struck by a “lack of continuity.”[18] Insofar as dress is concerned, the archaeological record demonstrates that the garments of a wealthy Copt in the sixth century and of a wealthy Muslim in the eighth century were virtually indistinguishable.[19] (See fig. 3.1.)

Islamic ideals began transforming shrouding styles in a fundamental way over two centuries after the Hijra, with the development of the “international Islamic style” of arabesques and abstract geometric patterns imitating the Kūfic script.[20] These designs gradually displaced the weavings of playful animals that had decorated the shrouds of the late antique and early Islamic periods.[21] They are a good example of ideological pressure driving artistic change. The change occurred, it seems, to accommodate the sensibilities of iconoclasts, who reacted against depictions of animals and humans on cloth. According to traditionists, Muḥammad opposed iconographic figures and realistic representations, such as those on decorated curtains or cushions. Those who “hand-crafted such pictures,” traditionists warned, would be “tortured on Judgment Day.” What they found most disturbing was the use of patterned, colorful clothes during the service of prayer, as designs proved to be a distraction from the worship of God.[22] The emergence in the ninth and tenth centuries of an “Islamic style” of shrouds is, of course, a sign of the slow progress of Islamization.

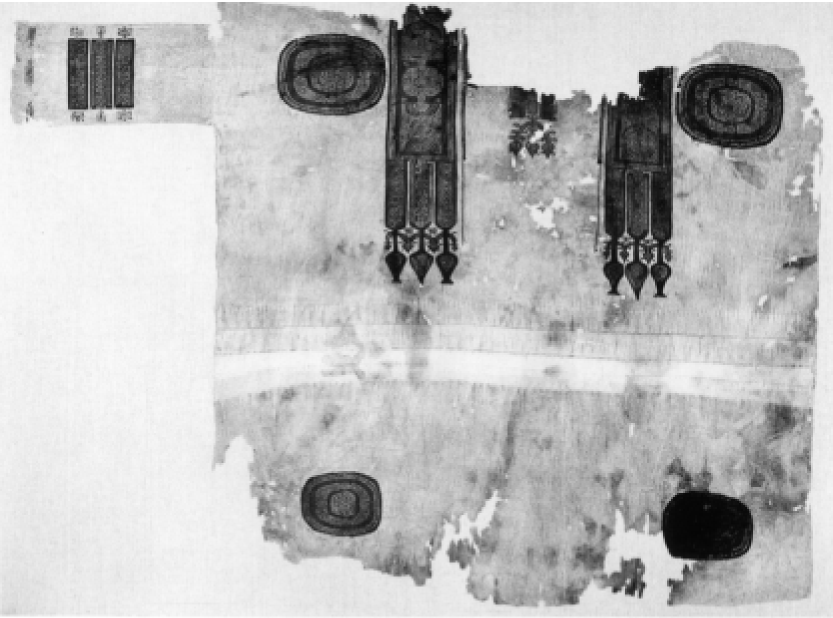

Figure 3.1 An early Islamic tunic of undyed wool, discolored in the areas where the garment came into contact with a decomposing body. The purple ornaments—roundels, leaf-shaped clavi, and sleeve bands—resemble late antique designs, yet radiocarbon analysis has determined dates in the 650–950 CE range. Source: A. De Moor, *Coptic Textiles from Flemish Private Collections* (1993), no. 90. Courtesy of Professor Dr. A. De Moor. Reproduced with permission.

However limited the impact of Islamic ideals on the techniques of textile production in the early Islamic era, the Muslims of this age associated textiles with the success of the Arab conquests. One of the signs of the Muslim victory was the acquisition of thousands of elegant robes from the vanquished. According to treaties, whether genuine or forged, the conquerors had required two thousand robes from the Christians of Najrān in yearly tribute—eventually reduced by ‘Umar II to two hundred robes, of forty dirhams each, and the additional sum of eight thousand dirhams. From Yemeni Jews and Magians, the Muslims had received clothes in lieu of the poll tax. From the Copts in Egypt, they had obtained woolen gowns, turbans, and breeches, in a tribute to be renewed year after year.[23]

The circulation of textiles and thus of shrouds took place in a robust preindustrial economy dominated by Muslim townsmen.[24] In this economy, the production of shrouds required a great deal of labor, and their cost was correspondingly high. Prices varied as dramatically as did the garments themselves, ranging from finely woven silk or linen mantles dyed with saffron or indigo to hastily woven cotton robes. Reliable data on the prices of shrouds in the early Islamic period do not exist. We hear of a man as wealthy as ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd spending two hundred dirhams on a new mantle (*ḥulla*) intended for burial, and we hear of other shrouds costing as little as thirty and as much as three hundred dirhams.[25] The fact that shrouds were associated with specific prices is significant, as it shows a monetary system at work in the market, where one could easily purchase garments. But these figures do not give any sense of the sacrifices ordinary folk endured to save for a decent burial.

The Geniza of Cairo, which preserved the letters of the Jewish community from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, gives some idea of the price of shrouds relative to income and other expenses. The least expensive garments cost slightly over one dinar, roughly half as much as the yearly poll tax—itself a prohibitive expense for a poor man, who might earn that sum by working for four months. Total payments for the grave clothing of a man of middling income amounted to five dinars. A wealthy Jewish woman used to receive thirty dinars a year from her husband, as well as twelve irdabbs of wheat. Regarding her shroud, she said, “I wish to have a [new] burial attire, since I have none with which I am satisfied. There should be bought for me a robe of fine Dabīqī linen with a hood, a mantle, and a cloak, and *niṣāfī* material for the bier and a braid.” All this cost her about twenty-five dinars. The total expenses for her burial—once we add the nine-or ten-dinar coffin and the negligible gifts due to the corpse washer, the Muslim wailers, and the gravediggers—exceeded her yearly income from her husband and surpassed the exorbitant price necessary to ransom an ordinary captive.[26]

After the Arab conquests, Muslim townsmen would ordinarily select their own burial attire in anticipation of death. The shrouding of the corpse would take place in an organized way, before the procession toward the cemetery.[27] By one ruling, shrouds offered at the cemetery would not be accepted: only the shrouds the deceased had been dressed in at the house could be worn in the grave.[28] In this urban context, the ideal celebrated in early Arabic poetry lost its relevance and its power. Shrouds, for Muslim townsmen, were not gifts tossed spontaneously upon a desperate, bloodied corpse lying on the battlefield.[29] Instead, they were an individual’s personal possession, to be procured before death. For Muslims who were preoccupied by the religious significance of burial attire, this was a meaningful personal investment.

Many passages in the biographical literature indicate that a man or woman, either immediately before death or far beforehand, would prepare for death by selecting the right clothes for the grave. This could well be the most important purchase one could make for the memory of oneself beyond death. Judging by the fact that a large portion of the biographical literature was devoted to specifying what shrouds an individual had requested in his will, the shroud was indeed something to be remembered by. In this regard, traditionist celebrations of the Prophet’s wardrobe for the grave were not at all unique but rather part of a broad pattern.

Certain individuals were commemorated exclusively for their shrouds. Nothing is known by history about Uhbān except for the fact that he had willed to be buried in two garments but was instead made beautiful in three. Similarly, Qays left no trace behind other than his personal and somewhat unorthodox preferences in shrouds and shrouding. He asked to be buried in a mantle with a border, but he wanted his pall (*sarīr*) wrapped in the white clothes he had used for prayer. He gave precise instructions on the piercing of his vestments in the pit, with the intention, it seems, that his skin should touch the earth.[30] Pietists also commemorated the burial attire of famous Muslims, of course. On the day of her death, Fāṭima asked to be given her new clothes (*thiyābī al-judud*) and for her bed (*firāsh*) to be placed in the middle of the room, so that she might lie with the comfort of her clothes and facing the *qibla.* ‘Ā’isha did not wish for a red velvet carpet (*qaṭīfa*) to drape her bier or cushion her grave. Asmā’ would have no perfume applied to her shroud, but she did plead for the clothes to be incensed, possibly so as to mask the smell of death, but not necessarily, as Muslims tended to rush their dead toward the grave.[31]

In the eighth century, the late antique styles of shrouding still dominated, and Muslims dressed up for the grave in a variety of colors and designs. Rams, dancing ladies, fierce warriors, rabbits and lions and trees—in yellow, purple, or green, on wool and linen and silk tunics, waist-wrappers, kerchiefs, and turbans—gathered for death, configured in unique and original ways. If the “most important object among man-made things” was the garment that had reflected one’s “alter ego” during the course of life, how much more so in death.[32] Yes, one may be justified in suspecting that Copts rather than Muslims attached to their clothes decorative roundels of saintly warriors riding horses and spearing snakes.[33] Certainly a Christian child wore the woolen tunic with weavings of scantily clad Bacchic dancers. Small in size, it displays crosses here and there. Muslim pietists might have found scandalous the naked female figures, but even more so the crosses.[34] (Muḥammad wrecked any garment with the figure of a cross on it.)[35] But what are we to make of the famous wool tapestry linked to the caliph Marwān? It contains an Arabic inscription alongside stylized cocks on pedestals, woven in the Sasanian tradition.[36] (See fig. 3.2.) Evidently, the caliphate sanctioned garments displaying animal figures, and some Muslims were perfectly happy to wear these blessed weavings to the dark grave. (See fig. 3.3.)

An ambiguous symbol, the shroud reflected an image of the person whose body had become invisible, for the custom in Islam was to wrap the entire body, face included, in a cocoon.[37] It was improper to visit the dead as they lay waiting for burial until they were properly shrouded. When a bereft friend did enter the chamber, he or she would find the body entirely hidden. To unveil the face of the deceased so as to offer the ritual kiss of death, as Abī Bakr did with Muḥammad, was a special prerogative.[38] Normally, the Muslims who attended the funeral procession and the burial saw nothing of the dead person but a pile of shrouds. Thus they remembered, when they thought of a person’s last moments above the earth, the impression they had observed in the mirror of shrouds.

If the choice of shrouds represented one’s personality and somehow promised the survival of individuality beyond death, it did so in a limited way. Though one could express individual preferences to an unusual degree, there were only a number of available styles and gestures—

the formulaic and repetitive ways—by which one could endeavor to distinguish oneself. Not all aimed for originality. To signal by one's choice of shrouds ideological affiliation to a certain group and conformity with a certain mentality was highly desirable.

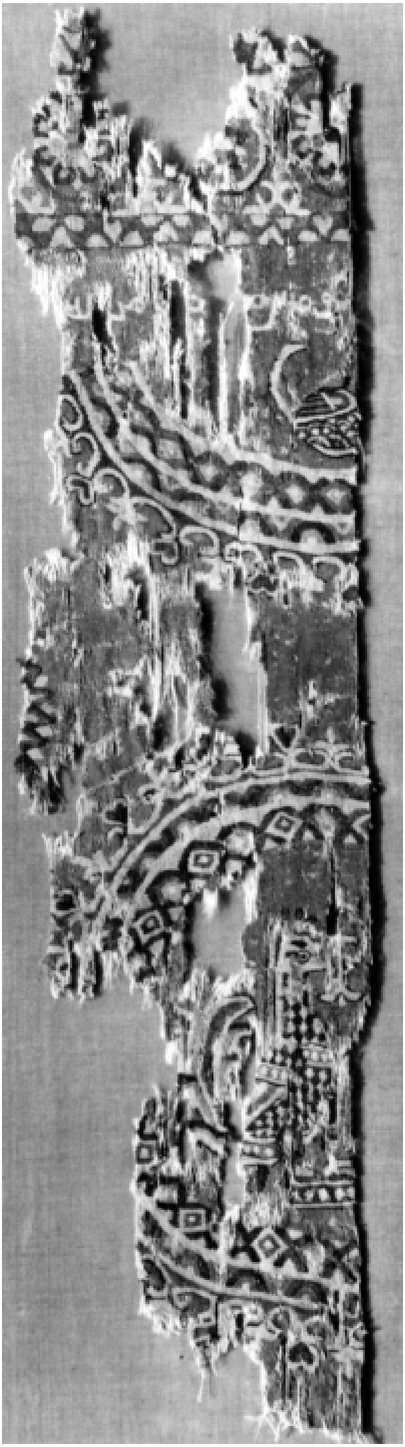

Figure 3.2 The fragmented wool tapestry identified with caliph Marwān I (r. 684–685) or II (r. 744–749). A barely legible kufic inscription below the top horizontal line indicates: “[*Amīr al-M] u’minīn M[arwān] umira*

bihi …" or "It has been ordered by the Commander of the Faithful, Marwān …" A stylized cock on a pedestal, designed in the Sassanian tradition, can readily be appreciated in the bottom roundel. This piece *of ṭirāz-embroidery* is the earliest one identified with the caliphate. It demonstrates in a compelling way that a certain class of Muslims appreciated both caliphal blessings and pictorial weavings. Such a conclusion could not have been reached by reading the pietistic literature alone, since it was dominated by iconoclastic voices suspicious of governmental gifts. Source: Photo by courtesy of The Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., 73.524. Acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1947. Reproduced with permission.

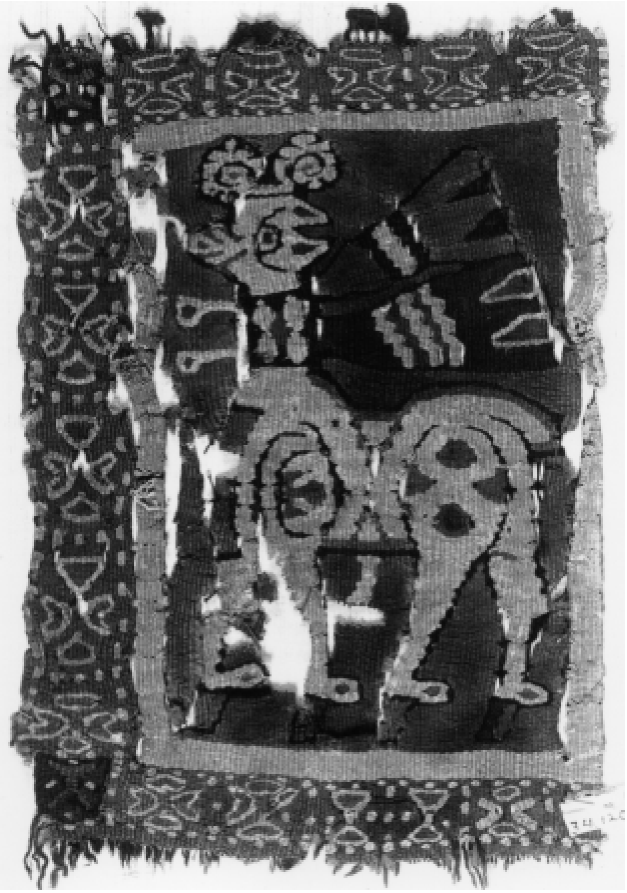

Figure 3.3 A seventh-or eighth-century weaving, from a Persian or Mesopotamian loom, of a ram in undyed cotton set against a brown and blue woolen background. Source: Nancy Britton, *A Study of Early Islamic Textiles in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (1938): Helen and Alice Colburn Fund, 34.120. Photo by courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Reproduced with permission. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved.

Sources of Religious or Worldly Distinction

“Which shroud is best?” an Iraqi fellow once asked ‘Ā’isha. The mother of the believers was shocked. “Woe onto you!” she replied, “What is bothering you?” Tactfully, the Iraqi changed the subject to a less controversial matter, the right order of the Qur’ān.[39] Perhaps this question upset ‘Ā’isha because it implied that Muslims were divided in their preferences for burial attire, a division reflected in the multiple and contradictory traditions about the shrouds of Muḥammad. When Muslims argued about what precisely the Prophet had worn to the grave, competing ideas about the value and merit of clothes collided. Pietists upheld an oral tradition expressing Muḥammad’s preference: “Of your clothes wear the white ones, for they are the best of clothes, and shroud within them your dead.” A white cloak, though plain and relatively inexpensive, could increase in value and confer upon the dead a special distinction if one had used it to worship. For this reason, Ibn al-Mubārak (‘Abdallāh, d. 797) recommended that a man “be shrouded in his own garments in which he was accustomed to pray” (*fī thiyābihi `llatī kāna yuṣallī fīhā*). Another obvious advantage of white shrouds was that they were considered the “purest” (*aṭhar*).[40]

Yet some religious scholars disagreed with this preference. In opposition to those who wished for plain white shrouds worn down by prayer, they held that anyone with wealth (*sa‘a*) should not be rebuked for choosing a shroud of silk. The best of shrouds, in their view, was a luxurious mantle (*ḥulla*), just as the best animal to slaughter was a horned ram. When al-‘Abbās asked in his will to be shrouded in a beautiful garment (*burd ḥibard*), the example of the Prophet served him as well as it did those who preferred simple white cotton cloaks. “The Messenger of God,” argued the proponents of fancy shrouds, “had commanded that shrouds be sought generously” (*amara rasūl Allāh an yustajāda `l-akfān*). When a man asked Muḥammad how to shroud his brother, Muhammad replied, “Beautify his shroud” (*aḥsin kafanahu*). If red in color, it would have the advantage of warding off evil.[41]

How should we understand this divergence within the Oral Tradition regarding the ideal attire for burial? Two camps espoused contrary propositions. Ascetic Muslims who tended toward the renunciation of worldly goods generally advocated modest white shrouds that had been used for worship. Prosperous and urbane merchants, whose spirit also pervaded the religion of Islam, generally advocated beautiful, lavish shrouds. This is only a generalization, of course. A single person might espouse the positions associated with the two extremes. A certain Qays, for example, asked to be shrouded both in his white prayer robe and in a mantle with a colorful border.[42] There were also Muslims who appreciated new clothes more than used prayer cloaks, yet considered fancy shrouds an extravagance. Ḥudhayfa ibn al-Yamān’s example illustrates this attitude perfectly. He sent a man to purchase a shroud for him, and the man chose a new red mantle (*ḥulla*) worth three hundred dirhams. On seeing it, Ḥudhayfa asked him to return it and to buy instead two white cloths, “for do not be excessive” (*lā tughālū*) in shrouding. In his view, these shrouds would stay with him “only for a short while,” until God would dress him in better or worse clothes (*fa-innahumā lan yutrakā ‘alayya iliā qalīlan ḥatta ulbisa khayran minhumā aw sharran minhumā*).[43] It is rare to find such a clear dichotomy drawn between man-made shrouds and the God-given garments to be worn in the Garden.

On his deathbed, Abū Bakr asked his daughter ‘Ā’isha to tell him in what garments her husband the Messenger had been shrouded. She informed him it had been in three white Yemenite cloths. Deliberately diverging from the Prophet’s example, Abū Bakr asked her to prepare for him two garments in addition to his cloak, which had a stain that he wanted washed away for use in the grave. To this she replied, “But, father, it is worn [*khaliq*]!” He insisted, “The living have more of a right to new clothes.” These shrouds are but “for the purulent cadaver [*li`l-muhla*].”[44] Abū Bakr’s preference was not uncontroversial, as indicated by ‘Ā’isha’s protestations. The problem was not only that the garments, used and stained, differed from the exemplary shrouds of Muḥammad, but also that Abū Bakr’s reasoning privileged the living over the dead. He favored the use of new garments in this world while finding their use in the grave wasteful.

Medina’s jurist Mālik held it was fine for the dead to be buried in a single garment, if more than one was not available. At hand jurists had the example of the martyrs who had shared shrouds. With unfailing authority al-Shāfi‘ī declared, “Whatever the dead is shrouded in, it is permitted to him, God willing, for the Prophet shrouded a few of the dead on the day of the battle of Uḥud with a single striped woolen garment [*namira*].” However, one should “try to conceal the pudenda.”[45] Generally, Muslim tradition favored three shrouding garments for a man and five for a woman. This number could be increased so long as it remained uneven (odd numbers brought good fortune). It is unclear why women should have more shrouds than men. But according to Ibn al-Mundhir (d. 930), women have a heightened zone of shame (*‘awra*) to veil in the state of life, and “so after death.” Perhaps for this reason Ibn Sīrīn and other jurists recommended that the thighs of female corpses be bound tightly with a strip of cloth. At any rate, the key principle in procuring burial attire for men or women was this: the more shrouds the better. As ‘Ā’isha put it, whoever possessed the ability (*li man qadara*)—whether it was attained by fortune and hard work or predestined by God—should use at least three shrouds.[46]

It is surprising in light of the cost of shrouds and the tendency of the early Islamic tradition toward asceticism (*zuhd*) that jurists recommended burial in multiple articles of clothing. The normative, bourgeois standard of three garments for men and five for women was extremely—and, for some, prohibitively—high. Why did the early Islamic tradition, which has been described as "egalitarian" in its attempt to make "differences of rank and affluence" seem "irrelevant," not adopt a lower standard, one that paupers could more easily reach? Impoverished men and women would have had difficulties procuring a single new garment. The early Islamic expectation that Muslims would wear beautiful shrouds to the grave seems the more surprising when it is compared to Jewish and Christian ideals.[47]

Rabban Gamaliel set an example to the Jews of late antiquity when, "disregarding his own dignity," he attended his own burial in linen shrouds costing but a *zuz.* There were reasons to believe the dead would be resurrected "in their own clothes," sprouting from the ground as a grain of wheat, yet rabbis faulted wealthy Jews whenever they put the poor to shame by lavish displays. So as not to mock the poor by distinguishing them from those who could afford a fringed shroud, the fringes of the rich were to be tucked away into the folds of the shroud. The rabbis deemed raiment containing mixed stuffs and forbidden threads—unfit for ordinary use—perfectly suitable as shrouds, "for as soon as a man dies he is free from the commandments." Not placing a premium value on burial attire, the Babylonian Talmud decreed that garments thrown by grieving parents at the tomb needed to be restored to the living owners.[48]

Legal attempts to curb extravagant burial attire date far back to Solon's laws in antiquity. Yet Christians had their own dramatic example of humility in Jesus of Nazareth, buried by Joseph in a clean linen shroud abandoned at the empty tomb by Christ risen in heavenly white. Saint Hylarion was buried as many other ascetics in his everyday goat-hair tunic. Father Antony, whose emaciated body had so lightly tread on that boundary between desert and city, heaven and earth, asked with his last breath that his sheepskin and worn cloak be returned to Athanasius (d. 373), who had given the cloak to him when it was new. Bishop Athanasius felt so thankful and empowered by this spiritual inheritance, which left Antony barely clothed, that he dedicated the last lines of his *Life of Antony* to the saint's preparations for burial (and his own dogmatic opinions against the Egyptian custom of mummification). Most relevant for the purposes of early Islamic history are the canons of the Nestorian Synod of 676, convoked by the patriarch George I (661–681) and held on the island of Diren in East Arabia. Canon 18 sought to prohibit Christians from shrouding their dead in silken wraps and expensive garments. Modest attire, dictated the council, should suffice for the faithful.[49]

Ascetic Muslims censured sharply the use of worldly clothing in this life, even associating it with polytheists. They warned the one who dared to wear luxurious vestments accepted in gift form that he would "have no share in the hereafter."[50] In traditions in praise of poverty, they encouraged a man "to abandon his property, as any worldly possession created love for this world, which prevented the believer from longing for the world to come."[51] A hint of this attitude may be detected in the reaction of Abū Bakr against new shrouds. Yet Muslims in general were not staunchly opposed to an investment in red silks for burial attire. Nobody protested the saying of the Messenger, "May one of you make beautiful the shroud of *his* brother."[52] Never did the springs of eloquence compel ascetics to denounce, with the passion and rhetoric of a John Chrysostom or a Peter Damian, expensive shrouds as a wasteful and indulgent expenditure. Nor did they warn Muslims that burial in such worldly clothes would endanger their entry into the Garden.[53]

Charitable Muslims did not become deaf to paupers' needs, or they would not have related the story of ʻĀmir and the shepherdess. Yet much of the time their eyes focused not on rags but on the latest urban fashions of clothing the dead. Traditionists evoked styles with the discerning sophistication of a Jerome, yet without his satire. They rarely found it necessary to remind Muslims that the new styles—purple turbans, saffron veils, silken Arabesques, sweeping mantles, all parading by candlelight on red and yellow biers decorated by fresh green palm leaves—bore little semblance to Muḥammad's original shrouds, red or white. However, one frustrated collector of prophetic traditions did feel compelled to exclaim, when Ibn Jurayj told him it was becoming popular for Muslims to wear a new attire to the grave, "And where were the fine Coptic linens [*qabāṭī*] of that age?"[54]

In the matter of shrouds, the triumphant early Islamic economic ethos is easily distinguishable from the more egalitarian ethos of Judaism and Christianity. Given the stunning success of the Arab conquests, the rapid establishment of an Islamic empire, and the fact that Muslim jurists and traditionists were heavily engaged in the commerce and industry of textiles, this divergence is not surprising. The "Islamic ideal of society," scholars have suggested, shaped itself "from the very first in accordance with the ideas and aims of a rising merchant class." Bourgeois traditions advanced by this class served to justify the use of luxurious materials "as permissible and to some extent even laudable." "Poverty," preached a Muslim saying, "is almost like apostasy." It is, of course, not difficult to find in the early Islamic discourse multiple sayings conveying the opposite view, an ascetic-minded egalitarianism. Nevertheless, such sayings simply follow in the footsteps of late antique Judaism and Christianity. Islam diverged in a new and fascinating way with the traditions in favor of beautiful garments.[55]

Pietists made little effort to justify the expense of shrouds. Recording in endless detail their recommendations against constricting trousers, Arab turbans, or red silk mantles, they did not bother to explain what were the implications of burial in this or that costume, with two or seven shrouds. In rare instances, such as in the anecdotes about Ḥudhayfa's and Abū Bakr's choice of shrouds, they implicitly criticized an investment in costly attire for use in the grave as irrational: a wasteful indulgence in consideration of the belief in God's ability to dress the dead in new clothes. The idea of an otherworldly recompense (*thawāb*) appears linked in the Qur'ān to the image of garments (*thiyāb*). At the end of days, God would clothe the bones of believers with flesh, and He would reward the elect with robes of silk, gold bracelets, and strings of pearls, which they would enjoy in the Garden. Unbelievers and hypocrites, by contrast, would wear garments of fire in Hell, custom made by God.[56] On the basis of this belief, pietists could easily have dismissed the shroud as an absurd expenditure, for surely Muslims should trust in God ("The Master Weaver") to tailor for them new clothes on Judgment Day.

In fact, Muslims rationalized spending money on beautiful shrouds in two different ways. Between death and the resurrection, they believed, Muslims would dwell in the grave. They required proper attire in this state. Respectable dress was important in part because the dead "would visit each other in their shrouds" (*yatazāwarūna fī akfānihim*).[57] Although some Muslims believed that angels visiting the grave would dress the deceased in magical shrouds, and that at the resurrection God would make them rise absolutely naked, other Muslims held it important to dress up in shrouds to appear presentable before the Lord (*yalbasu kafanahu li`l-'arḍ 'alā rabbihi*).[58] "Be fastidious in your shrouds," commanded an oral tradition, "because you will be resurrected in them" (*tanawwaqūfi `l-akfān fa-innakum tub'athūna bihā*).[59] In addition, Muslims defended lavish shrouds by advancing a social consideration. In the saying of Muḥammad, "Beautify his shroud," the imperative concerns not one's own shroud, but that of another. Such an investment seemed altruistic. This point brings us to consider shrouds from a social perspective, as objects binding two individuals beyond the moment of death.

Family Debts

The Islamic science of inheritance shares (*‘ilm al-farā’iḍ*) calculates with mind-numbing precision the rightful shares of the various heirs—not only of spouses, children, and parents, but even of agnatic granddaughters, uterine brothers, and such distant relatives. There is no need to review the complex calculations here.[60] But it is curious that this algebra lacks significant discussions about the source from which the capital for a shroud should derive in cases when the deceased failed to anticipate death or was unable to prepare his or her own shrouds. Whose financial responsibility was it, in such circumstances, to procure for the dead person a shroud? Was the shroud paid off from the capital of the dead person before the division of the estate into charitable bequests and family inheritance? If the dead died beset by unpaid debts—a sinful negligence for Muslims—was it the ethical responsibility of the primary heirs to give of their own money for the shroud? Did the Public Treasury or charitable fraternities subsidize paupers’ funerals? Some of these questions were broached superficially and inconclusively in the Books of Funerals and elsewhere, but rarely in the Books on Inheritance. Perhaps this omission was due to the preoccupation of the science of inheritance with the confusing Qur’ānic equations, which assigned no variable to shrouds.[61]

According to jurists, the cost of shrouds acquired after death should derive from the entire estate of the deceased, or from the capital before its division among heirs and creditors (*min ra’s al-māl dūna warathatihi wa-ghuramā’ihi*). First priority in dividing the estate would be given to purchasing a set of shrouds commensurate with the style and income of the deceased. The remainder of the estate would subsequently be parceled out to settle debts, bequests, and inheritance claims, in this order of precedence.[62]

Certain jurists came to consider the shroud as belonging to the category of debt (*dayn*), in an ingenious ruling traced back to the Meccan jurist ‘Aṭā ibn Abī Rabāḥ.[63] This categorization was cause for casuistic humor. One wit suggested that creditors rather than heirs should be held responsible for these “debts of God” (*duyūn Allāh*).[64] Whether jurists gave priority to shrouds over debts or considered them outright debts, the supreme obligation of purchasing shrouds became firmly established. Discharge of a debt was essential to the well-being of a dead person in the afterlife. Muslims risked torture in the grave for dying insolvent.[65] The Prophet set a high standard by refusing to hold the funerary prayer for anyone with outstanding debts.[66] “The soul of the believer,” according to a saying popular with jurists, “is linked to his debt until it is discharged on his behalf.”[67] It was imperative, then, for a person to make every effort to settle the accounts on shrouds *before* the moment of death.

When an individual failed to prepare his own shrouds, tremendous social pressure would fall on family members to settle the debt on behalf of their relative. But who should pay? Probably there was the social expectation that the member who received the largest share of the inheritance should also pay the largest share of the shroud. Thus, paternal heirs must have paid more on average than maternal heirs. Shīʿte women, who received a bigger piece of the inheritance pie than Sunni women, probably paid more on average than their counterparts.[68] However, it is impossible to produce statistics to support these reasonable expectations.

Lacking hard and fast rules in inheritance law, different family members claimed a greater (or lesser) share of the burden or privilege of shrouding a relative.[69] Individual contributions depended as much on wealth and social status as on personal generosity and proximity to the deceased. Sons normally felt responsible for inadequately provided parents. Al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad's son, for instance, tried to convince his dying father to accept two additional garments to add to his collection of three shrouds.[70] The seventh Imam according to Twelver Shīʿites, Abū al-ฤasan al-Awwal (Mūsā al-Kāẓim, d. 799) fondly recalled shrouding his father, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), in two garments with incisions that his father had worn for sacred purposes, one of his long shirts, a turban that had belonged to the fourth Imam, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn (d. 714), and a forty-dinar mantle he had purchased, which "today" would cost four hundred dinars.[71] One father dictated to his son a will specifying he should be shrouded "in the gown with the silken shawl that he had been accustomed to pray in on Fridays," some other garments, and a long shirt. The son asked why he had commanded this. "Because I fear the people will overwhelm you," replied the father. He expected the crowd would clamor for five shrouds, including an expensive turban.[72]

To fail a father in need was a sign of utmost greed, but sometimes a fitting punishment, as the story of the miser Khālid ibn Yazīd indicates. The son, miserly like his father, could not be bothered to wash the corpse with running water nor have a niche dug in the grave. He shrouded his father in worn-out rags.[73] This story, reported in a famous book on misers, outlines the boundaries of respectable behavior. The case of ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAwn (d. 768) is more complex than Khālid's. It illustrates how, when sons were unwilling to procure for their father an extra shroud, another family member might take on the responsibility. ʿAbdallāh owned a Coptic cloak that had originally belonged to the pious Ibn ʿUmar, liked to display his navel while wrapping his garment during walks through the market, and had gold teeth and a predilection for elegant clothes. Such a man could only expect a sumptuous shroud. One day, on his way to the mosque, he fell and injured himself beyond recovery. Soon afterward “he was shrouded in a mantle [*burd*] purchased for two hundred dirhams.” His sons had protested, “We shall only buy [him burial attire] for less than that” (*lā nashtarī illā bi-dūni dhālika*). But his wife had replied, “Reckon the remainder to my account.”[74]

The biographical literature emphasizes the provision of shrouds by sons for fathers. In an inheritance system favoring male descendants, this emphasis may reflect the largesse expected from the person who would benefit the most, financially speaking, from the death. At the same time, this emphasis also reflects the desire by surviving sons (formally surnamed “sons of”) to commemorate their links to their fathers. This may account for the fact that sons’ gifts to their mothers are hardly ever represented. The discrepancy is to be expected, however, because biographers profiled men far more often than women.

As this literature is dominated by male voices, it rarely represents women procuring shrouds. This relative silence is remarkable only because women must often have made the clothes and decorated them with weavings. Occasionally, the biographical literature does reveal a woman’s solicitude for a male relative lacking adequate shrouds. ‘Ā’isha, for example, worried about her father’s preference for a used garment, as we have seen. Abū Dharr’s wife despaired when her husband lay dying without an appropriate shroud. As we shall see, the young helper who provides the dying Abū Dharr with a shroud received the garment as a gift from his mother. Women worked as weavers beautifying relatives’ shrouds, yet their contribution was not fully acknowledged by early Islamic authors.

A story about the shrouding of a famous martyr does, nevertheless, highlight the role of female relatives. Martyrs who died on the battlefield could not always expect a proper shroud. Even after the first wave of the Arab conquests, they were usually buried in their bloodied tunic (*namira*). Oftentimes they were dispossessed of their coats of mail, shoes, and iron swords, then simply dumped in a mass grave (*qabr rahṭ*) and covered by a variety of redolent grass (*idhkhir*).[75] At times warriors fared better. Muḥammad discovered the celebrated martyr of the battle of Uḥud, his uncle Ḥamza, lying at the bottom of the valley. His belly had been ripped open, his nose and ears mutilated, his liver extracted (and chewed upon by Hind bint ‘Utba, who was unable to swallow it). “Were it not that Umm Ṣafīya would be miserable and it might become a custom after me,” the Prophet declared, “I would leave him as he is, so that his body might find its way into the bellies of beasts and the crops of birds.” But Ḥamza’s sister Ṣafīya had reached the battlefield with a shroud. Her son, acting on instructions from Muḥammad, tried to prevent her from advancing with it. She insisted. So they took the short mantle from her and spread it over him and the corpse of a Helper lying next to him. They covered his head fully, as was customary. At his feet they placed branches of African rue (*shajar al-ḥarmal*).[76] In this case, we see how valiantly the sister of the deceased warrior worked to cover her brother with a mantle, and we learn how disappointed the mother would have been had her son been abandoned to a gruesome end. Even though this particular story has mythical elements, it may well reflect ordinary relationships from the age of Muḥammad. The deceased warrior's family and in particular his female relatives were the ones who cared most about providing the burial attire. Lamenting a hero fallen in battle, the tribe's women would demand, according to an Arab poet, "Has a wrap not been tossed over the man?"[77]

Though surely mothers, such as Umm Ṣafīya, played a key role in providing their children with shrouds, early Islamic law held fathers accountable. A suckling or even a stillborn male fetus deserved in their eyes at least a piece of cloth, if not two, and a long shirt, if the father could afford it. A girl received anything from one garment to a veil and two wraps, depending on her age.[78] Three garments for boys and five for girls: this was the convention for fathers of middling income. The expectation was on fathers and masters to provide for their dependents: children and slaves. A certain Yūsuf, a convert from Judaism to Islam, emphasized this aspect of shroud giving when he claimed that, according to the Torah, the deed of shrouding a corpse is tantamount to the feeding of a child until he or she becomes independent (*kabīr*).[79] A slave who had been purchasing his freedom in installments (known as a *mukātab*) would be shrouded by his master (*sayyid*); a slave who had received a pledge promising freedom would be shrouded by his guarantor (*rāhin*).[80] ʿĀmir ibn ʿAbd Qays of Baṣra faulted the behavior of his shepherdess' masters because they failed to provide her with burial attire.

Islamic law found the burial attire of girls far more interesting than that of boys. Whereas the shrouds of the Prophet's son, Ibrāhīm, were of no relevance to transmitters of Muslim tradition, the shrouds of his daughters Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm were worth remembering. When Umm ʿAṭiyya al-Anṣāriyya was dressing Zaynab's body for burial, Muḥammad entered the room (*dakhala ʿalaynā*) and gave the women his own waist-wrapper (*ḥiqw*), known elsewhere by a different name (*izār*). When Umm Kulthūm died, he sat at the threshold of the door (*jālis ʿind al-bāb*) and gave the corpse dressers five garments: underwear (*ḥiqāʾ*), a woman's chemise (*dirʿ*), a veil (*khimār*), a coat-like shawl (*milḥafa*),and finally a fifth garment. This last piece, unidentified by the canonical tradition (*fi `l-thawb al-ākhir*), was named in her obituary as a mantle with stripes of yellow silk (*burd ḥarīr ḥulla siyarāʾ*).[81] The eighth-century Medinese jurist Mālik related the first tradition. Future generations, living in cities where the sexes were increasingly differentiated, wondered whether it was acceptable for a woman to wear a man's loincloth: *hal takaffana `l-mar'atu fī izār al-rajul?* With Malik's tradition already well established, they were obliged to concede.[82]

Of gifts to free relatives, only one kind became controversial: the shroud from husband to wife. Some jurists were of the opinion that a woman should be shrouded in coarse cloth, and they expressed surprise at anyone using linen for a woman's shroud.[83] Ibn Ḥazm would spell out the legal issue most sharply, since he did not admit analogical reasoning and sought instead to rule directly on the basis of the Sharīʿa: "The shroud of a woman and the digging of her grave are from her own capital [*min ra's mālihā*]. This is not incumbent on her husband [*lā yalzamu dhālika zawjahā*] because the belongings of Muslims are restricted [*maḥẓūra*] whenever there is no stipulation [*naṣṣ*] from the Qur'ān or the Sunna."[84] Ibn Ḥazm and other jurists chose not to discuss in this context shroud gifts from wife to husband, which were always welcome.

In the context of washing corpses, we discussed the issue of the legal separation of husband and wife as a result of death. The problem also emerges in the context of shrouds. In his discussion on stingy heirs and shrouds (*wa-idhā tashāḥḥa al-waratha fi `l-kafan*), Ibn Qudāma broaches the question of wives' shrouds. He sketches the following divergence: (ʿĀmir) al-Shaʿbī, Abū Ḥanīfa, and a few Shāfiʿite jurists agree that the "shroud of a wife and the provision of her burial derive from her capital, if she has any." Some other unnamed Shāfiʿites disagreed with Mālik, apparently maintaining that the shroud was incumbent on the husband (*yajibu ʿala `l-zawj*). As her clothing (*kuswah*) and maintenance (*nafaqa*) were his responsibility in life, so it must be in death, they reasoned by analogy. The husband ought to provide for the dead wife as if he were her slave master or father (*ka-sayyid al-ʿabd wa `l-wālid*). In "our opinion," Ibn Qudāma responds, "clothing and maintenance are incumbent during marriage due to the ability [of the husband] to seek sexual delight [with his wife], and for this reason it [the husband's support] drops with the violation of marital duties and the separation by divorce." Similarly, the marital bond is "severed with death." At that moment, she becomes "separated from him," transmogrifying, as it were, into "a female stranger" (*bānat minhu bi `l-mawt fa-ashbahat alajnabiyya*). Thus, if a wife dies insolvent, responsibility for purchasing her burial attire reverts to her blood relatives, who had been obligated to provide her maintenance before marriage. If she has no such relatives, then the Public Treasury (*bayt al-māl*) should bear the expense, "as for she who never had a husband" (*ka-man lā zawja lahā*). A kinship tie, unlike a marriage tie, "is not voided by death." Like the bond between father and daughter but unlike the bond between husband and wife, the bond between master and slave survives the moment of death—in this case because the maintenance of a slave is a slave master's responsibility deriving from the "duty of possession" (*ḥaqq al-milk*). In short, fathers must provide for their children and masters for their slaves, but husbands bear no responsibility for ex-wives.[85]

Jurists with strident views on marriage bonds did not always rule the day. There inevitably occurred subversive and imaginative actions, sometimes under the very eyes of the law. What example could be more fitting than that of Muʿādh ibn Jabal, a judge of al-Yaman appointed by the Prophet? He returned from his travels to discover his wife had been buried just two hours earlier, shrouded in but two threadbare garments. So he had her exhumed, and he returned her to the grave in a fine new cloth.[86] Legal imperatives aside, it must generally have been out of love, from a personal sense of duty, and from the desire to appear generous in one's own eyes and in those of others, that a husband gave his wife a shroud. The gesture indicated a desire to remain connected beyond the moment of death, as in the case of ʿĀmir ibn ʿAbd Qays, who turned the shepherdess into his "wife in the Garden" by giving her a shroud.

Shroud Gifts in the Age of the Caliphs

In the sections above, we considered two types of investments: the first, when a person procured his or her own burial attire; the second, when a family member offered a shroud to settle a relative's debt or to reciprocate in part for an anticipated inheritance. Let us now turn to a number of anecdotes commemorating gifts of shrouds by strangers and diplomats. There are relatively few anecdotes of this kind, but the scanty evidence will suggest a significant conclusion: while Muslims associated with the caliphate appreciated government-issued shrouds, ascetics found these gifts problematic.

Early Muslims were highly self-conscious of the value of gifts in negotiating relationships and adjusting social rank. They saw rejecting a gift without good reason, taking a gift back ("like a dog that swallows its own vomit"), and refusing to grant a solicited gift as provocative acts.[87] Various terms conveyed different modes of gift giving in Arabic. They range in color from charity (*ṣadaqa*) to bribe (*rishwa*). In legal terms, a *hiba* is a free gift, such as a caliph might make to a subject. It involves the transfer of personal property without the expectation of a material gift in exchange. A *hadiyya* is somewhat closer to the Maussian notion of a *prestation,* that is, a gift whose acceptance demands a counter-gift. A stranger's shroud gift may simply be considered a grant (*'aṭā'*), though this category is rather generic and imprecise.[88] In the medieval Christian economy, gifts to the dead appeared to return in various guises to bless the giver in life or in death.[89] One may expect that similarly in the medieval Islamic economy, a gift to the dead would procure his or her *baraka* (or blessing) in this life and his or her *shafā'a* (or intercession) in the hereafter. But the sources do not reveal such a mechanism at work, at least not in a straightforward way. For this reason, one may theoretically consider shroud gifts as closer in meaning to a *hiba* than a *hadiyya.*

Shrouds could not be passed off as "charity," according to Mālik, for charity was reserved to mendicants and poor folk. It was also not clear they could be given in expiation of an oath (*kaffārat al-yamīn*).[90] Part of the difficulty in classifying gifts of shrouds resided in the ambiguity about this type of property. Did shrouds belong to the living or to the dead? According to al-Sarakhsī, the transfer of property (*tamlīk*) could not take place with shrouds, since one could "not possess what was occupied by the need of the dead" (*lā yamlikūna mā huwa mashghūl bi-ḥājat al-mayyit*).[91] For similar reasons, jurists disagreed about the proper punishment for an accursed grave robber (*nabbāsh*). Abī Yūsuf and al-Shāfi'ī were in favor of the amputation of the thief's hand, for the crime seemed tantamount to the robbing of the garments of the living. Abī Ḥanīfa and Muḥammad (al-Shaybānī) were of a different mind, however, since it was not clear to them how the dead could possibly own inalienable property.[92]

Although shroud gifts were unrequited in a material sense, the giver did stand to gain something for his act. Under the heading "The recompense [*thawāb*] of him who shrouds a believer," a Shī'ite source declared that the shroud giver insures "his garment [*kiswa*] for the Day of the Resurrection."[93] God would reward the giver's good deed by compensating him in the afterlife. Subtle benefits were to be gained also in this world, for by his generosity a gift giver would gain in symbolic prestige. To give a shroud was a mark of munificence and nobility. "And I do not know," an Arab poet confessed, "who tossed on him his mantle," yet it was given by one of glorious blood.[94]

Shrouds, some held, honored the living more than the dead.[95] In cases where the receiver of the gift occupied a higher rank than the giver, the shroud elevated the giver in social status. Conversely, in light of the fact that shrouds often flowed from high to low (they descended from masters to slaves, as we have seen, but not the other way around), a person risked lowering his status by accepting a gift from the wrong kind of person. The character of this social dynamic is partially illustrated by the touching story of Abī Dharr, one of the first converts to Islam, an ascetic man famous for his opposition to the corrupting influence of governmental largesse. Reportedly he died during ʻUthmān's caliphate (644–656), having been exiled by Muʻāwiya from Syria to al-Rabadha, a small town somewhat removed from Medina. Abī Dharr's wife was in his company as he lay dying away from home in a desolate land (*falāt min al-arḍ*). Disconsolate, she told him she had no garment with her that would be suitably expansive for him (*yasaʻuka*). He responded that they should find consolation in the loss of their children, a catastrophe that if borne with fortitude would shield parents from hellfire.[96] His assumption, it appears, was that eventually God would compensate him for his bereavement by providing him with the silks of the Garden. Whether or not he convinced his wife by this reasoning, she remained desperate to find for him a dignified shroud. So she started crying out to people on the road, imploring them to donate a shroud. Before accepting any such gifts from a stranger, Abī Dharr announced he would refuse shrouds from a commander (*amīr*), an overseer (*ʻarīf*), or a messenger journeying on a post horse (*barīd*), that is, from worldly and potentially corrupt people associated with the state. However, when a young helper approached with a shroud he had been keeping in his saddlebag in case of need and announced it had been woven for him by his mother (*min ghazl ummī*), Abī Dharr accepted graciously. In exchange, he offered him a humble response, "You are my companion, so shroud me" (*anta ṣāḥibī fa-kaffinnī*)."[97]

It was symbolic of its personal value that the garment had been woven by a mother rather than purchased in the market. But this was not the principal reason why the dying Abī Dharr decided to accept the gift. For him it was crucial that the shroud not debase him, a preoccupation betrayed by the restrictions he imposed on certain categories of persons. Abī Dharr refused to acquire an eternal debt to someone whose place in Paradise was still very much in question. Due to his age and relative distance from the Prophet, the young helper offering the shroud could never rank as Abī Dharr's equal. Yet he came close enough. Under the circumstances, Abī Dharr decided to accept the gift and, in the process, honored the young helper by calling him his companion.

Religious and social factors combined in different ways in this story. The prospect of burial without a dignified shroud weighed on everyone's mind, though it troubled Abī Dharr's wife in particular. Abī Dharr, by contrast, cared little for fanciful attire. Mostly he worried about the corrupting power of gifts by governmental agents. The anecdote derives its meaning from a political and economic context of which it is critical. Caliphs valued rare and exotic gifts, recorded by annalists and scribes in books on diplomatic gift exchanges, as reflections of personal power and the dignity of office.[98] They endeavored to express their own magnanimity by bestowing gifts on chosen subjects. Muslims prized few gifts as much as that of a robe embroidered with a caliphal inscription and destined for burial. This sort of a gift honored the gift giver as much as the receiver, for it showed the deepest commitment to the caliph—unbroken even by death—and belief in the power of a caliph's blessing to reach beyond the confines of this life. As such gifts could not be reciprocated, they expressed the caliph's generosity while highlighting the honored subject's sense of loyalty and dependency. Normally, caliphs gave these shrouds not to satisfy an evident need but in order to create a social link surviving death. The story of Muḥammad's wife Zaynab bint Jaḥsh (d. 641) and caliph ʻUmar I (r. 634–644) illustrates this nicely. She had already prepared her own shrouds by the time she saw death approaching her door. But then she began wondering if ʻUmar would provide her with a set of shrouds. Hearing of her imminent death, the caliph did indeed send her five garments from the Treasury (*min al-khazā'in*), which he himself selected one by one. Zaynab's sister wrapped her in these caliphal clothes and gave the original shrouds as charity (*ṣadaqa*) on Zaynab's behalf.[99] The values expressed by this anecdote are directly opposed to those attributed to Abī Dharr. Being against the effects of governmental largesse, this ascetic man would have rejected a commander's gift though he had no burial attire. Zaynab, however, gladly accepted the caliph's shrouds, considering them better than her own.

Enriched by the Arab conquests, did the caliphate on occasion purchase burial attire for the indigent or insolvent? Byzantine officials showed an interest in funding the burials of commoners. In addition, charitable Christian fraternities undertook burials in late antique and early Islamic Egypt. Amongst urban Jews, a fraternity (*ḥavurata*) sometimes engaged in burial, and charitable Jewish associations helped the needy with weddings, circumcisions, and visits to the house of mourning (*beyt ha-evel*) or the ossuary (*lakeṭ ʻatzamōi*).[100] By contrast, there is no reference in early Islamic literature to charitable institutions devoted to funding paupers' burials. An oral tradition holds that "once God granted the Prophet the success of the conquests [*futūḥ*]," Muḥammad announced he would settle the debt (*dayn*) of deceased Muslims.[101] This saying does not address shrouds directly, but debts. Still, if the caliphs found agreeable the categorization of shrouds as debts, then it is possible they sometimes provided shrouds for Muslims who died in debt. Most likely, however, is that the caliphate rarely provided the needy with shrouds.[102] Zaynab's story does indicate that shrouds came from the Treasury, but it also suggests that these goods were delivered, disregarding material need, to honored subjects belonging to the upper echelons of society.

Like 'Umar I, Muḥammad features in oral traditions on shroud giving. On one occasion, a woman supposedly offered the Prophet a cloak with weavings (*shamla*) and its own two borders. Muḥammad took it because he was "in need of it" (*muḥtājan ilayhā*), and he wore it, but an event soon forced him to bestow it on someone who whispered something in his ear. Some people grew indignant at the man who had forced the Prophet to act magnanimously, so they questioned his motives. "You requested it," they alleged, "knowing he would not refuse a solicitor" (*sa'altahu wa 'arafta annahu lā yaruddu sā'ilan*). The man justified himself by explaining he had asked for it as a shroud.[103] Part of the charm was that the Prophet himself had worn the robe, turning it into a relic of sorts.[104] To request the garment for everyday wear would have been improper, but it seemed justifiable to ask for it as dress for the grave.

The traditionist discourse invariably wrapped shrouds in ambiguities. While some objects appeared as sources of corruption, others seemed full of grace. These properties had less to do with the material or color than with the person giving the object, whose spirit would linger in the cloth like a fine perfume in a borrowed sweater. Muslims worried that on occasion, the blessing bestowed upon subjects might be undeserved. The son of 'Abdallāh ibn Ubayy, the famous hypocrite, approached Muḥammad, demanding a shroud for his father: "If you do not give it, we shall not cease reproaching you in this." Muḥammad succumbed to this pressure but refused to give the hypocrite the garment before the time of burial. Muḥammad then "took him out of his pit [*ḥufra*], spat on him … and dressed him in his long shirt," subjecting the corpse to public indecency. This "gift gone wrong" seemed undeservedly to intercede on behalf of a man otherwise destined for certain perdition. Having agreed to shroud and pray for a hypocrite, the Prophet was reproached by 'Umar. Tradition has it that, consequently, Gabriel enlightened Muḥammad by revealing to him the Qur'ānic verse 9:84: "Pray not for those who are forever dead, and stand not at their grave." Glossing the story several centuries afterward, Ibn Qudāma would clarify that the gesture had been made in honor of the hypocrite's son (*takrimatan li`bnihi)*: "By the blessing of the Messenger's long shirt, the torture [of the grave] would be warded off."[105]

Following this illustration of the ethos of an economy, the question arises: when did this social dynamic linking caliphal gifts to subjects emerge? *Ṭirāz* textiles, bands of shrouding cloth embroidered with a woven caliphal blessing, can sometimes be dated by the inscription. The earliest such datable shroud discovered stems from the caliphate of Marwān I (r. 684–685) or Marwān II (r. 744–749). It likely comes from the latter's reign, since the first reigned only for a short while, and self-consciously "Islamic" institutions began to develop only in the 690s, as we have seen, during the reign of his son, ʻAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705).[106] A gap exists in the material record between this Marwanid *ṭirāz* and the next such dated garment discovered: an ʻAbbasid *ṭirdz* from the reign of al-Ma'mūn, woven in the year 831.[107] Even so, specialists on textiles have linked many other garments that lack precise dates in the embroidery to Marwanid and early ʻAbbasid manufacture.[108] As the leaders of the Arab conquests, the Rāshidūn and the Sufyanid caliphs obtained countless robes in tribute from non-Muslim peoples. They shared the bounty with chosen subjects. Yet Muslims could not associate these garments of non-Muslim origin so intimately with the caliphate as they did the garments embroidered with the insignia of Marwanid and ʻAbbasid rulers. *Ṭirāz* shrouds served to draw an especially close connection between a caliph and his subject. Whether the anecdotes about Zaynab's and Abī Dharr's shrouds are accurate or not, whether they originated in the middle of the seventh century or a century later, the archaeological record helps us understand in what context the stories circulated and why eighth-century traditionists found them significant and worth telling. Imagined or remembered, oral traditions linking shrouds to the state played a key role in defining the ethos of the Marwanid and early ʻAbbasid economy.

In archaic societies, according to the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, one of the most important mechanisms that compels a person to make a present is the principle of reciprocation. A mysterious force immanent in things circulates in different material guises. Gifts possess a magical power, something of the essence of the giver, that forces the recipient to repay by offering another gift. In an economic system of "total services," collectivities as well as a network of rituals impose upon individuals the moral obligations of exchange and counter-exchange. Gifts in this system may appear to be free and generous but are oftentimes obligatory and self-interested.

In the preindustrial yet large-scale economy of the Arab caliphate, many goods were regarded simply as commodities to be purchased in the market. Certain goods possessed a social and a spiritual value, heightened when received in gift mode. This was true of shrouds imbued with the spirit of the giver. Abī Dharr and the young helper, Marwān and the man who wore the caliphal garment, and ʻĀmir and his shepherdess all forged intimate ties, surviving the moment of death, on account of the gift. Yet shrouds were unlike other gifts, and this makes gifts of shrouds very odd and therefore interesting as economic objects. Such gifts violate the principle of reciprocity; they interrupt the cycle of gift exchange that appeared to Mauss crucial to the vitality of premodern economies. Because gifts to the dead were removed from circulation, their productivity was severely limited. Not only did the dead have no way of returning the gift in a material sense. Whatever was buried with them would lie fallow unless the invisible hand of grave robbers intervened. In a sense, such objects may best be understood as sacrificial gifts. In an environment where orphans, slaves, and paupers were deprived of adequate garments, the sacrifice of clothes for the dead seems striking.

Investments in the afterlife make precious little sense from a neoclassical perspective. It is difficult to imagine, from this viewpoint, why Muslims would have chosen to bury garments, hard as they were to manufacture and so necessary in the economy of this world. Obviously, social and religious factors, rather than purely economic ones, determined the value of these goods.[109] Investing in shrouds made sense from an early Islamic perspective for a variety of reasons. Shrouds served individuals to commemorate aspects of their personality, ideological orientation, or financial success. They connected fathers with daughters, caliphs with notables, and individuals opposed to worldly goods with desperate, dying paupers. To the Muslims who sought to improve the well-being of relatives or strangers by providing them with expensive clothes for their use in the grave, shrouds belonged neither to the economy of this world nor to the economy of the hereafter. They belonged between and betwixt to what might be designated, if the expression should be allowed, “the economy *of al-barzakh.*” In this field of space-time—the interval between this and the next world closely associated with life in the grave between death and the resurrection—Muslims could wear fashionable robes without appearing worldly.

CHAPTER FOUR

Wailing for the Dead in the House of Islam

During the course of a day when one of the earliest converts to Islam, Abū Ṭalḥa, was away from home, his son passed away. His wife, the boy's mother, prepared the corpse for burial and put it aside in a corner of the house. When the father returned home, he asked, "How is the boy?" She responded with measured ambiguity, "His spirit was tranquil and I expect he has found rest." Abū Ṭalḥa assumed she was being truthful (*Ṣādiqa*), and so retired for the night. (An uncensored version of the story specifies that Umm Sulaym, the wife, ordered everyone to keep silent about the death of her son, perfumed herself, and persuaded her husband to engage in sex.) The next morning, as Abū Ṭalḥa was preparing to join the prophet Muḥammad in prayer, his wife broke the news to him. The father's reaction was muted. Outwardly he displayed no signs of grief.

This oral tradition idealized the expression of grief in a manner pietists found congenial. Al-Bukhārī related it in his collection of prophetic sayings under the title "The one who does not make manifest his sorrow when struck by a calamity." Forbearance marks the response, constructed in opposition to the early Islamic impression of pre-Islamic reactions. Surely the behavior of Abū Ṭalḥa's wife appears strange to us, but it seemed no less striking in the early Islamic milieu. Muslims expected that bereft mothers would actually display loudly various signs of personal distress and tragic bereavement, not bear the calamity in silence. For their exemplary composure and equanimity, Abū Ṭalḥa and his wife were rewarded. The prophet Muḥammad expressed the hope that God would bless them "in [their] night," and as things turned out, they were to have nine children, all reciters of the Qur'ān.[1]

In this chapter, we shall examine the early Islamic reaction to a ritual dominated by women: the practice of mourning for the dead.[2] The expression of violent emotions in response to death is not in itself an Islamic phenomenon. Lucian, the satirist from Samosata on the Euphrates, reminds us that wailing prevails everywhere, unlike burial customs, which vary significantly from one culture to another. Agitated responses to the shock of bereavement have been observed not only by anthropologists and psychologists, but also by sociobiologists. Macaques, zebra-finches, and various other animals react to the loss of off spring, a partner in rearing, or a member of the pack. Yellow baboon mothers have carried infant corpses for several days until, dehydrated and decomposed, the remains are finally left in peace. Gombe chimpanzees have uttered their terrifying *wraaah* calls following the fatal fall of an adult male. The intention here, however, is not to analyze expressions of mourning in a broad comparative context. It is to contribute to the study of bereavement by focusing on a distinct—and changing—cultural context.[3]

Furthermore, we shall concentrate not on the reasons for wailing but on the reasons against it. Here too an important qualification must be made. There is nothing particularly Islamic about a historical contest over the permissibility of displaying grief at funerals. Such a contest has been waged in different forms elsewhere, most famously in ancient Greece. The reader may remember Solon’s laws against blood-seeking mourners or the Apollonian determination of Socrates in the *Phaedo.*[4] Yet the early Islamic resistance to the “pre-Islamic” rites of mourning is worth discussing because it was highly ambitious and differentiated. This movement played out in different forms not only in Arabia and Mesopotamia, but also in the two main branches of Islam, the Sunni and the Shīʿite. Moreover, as opposition to the ritual gained adherents, it undermined to some degree women’s ability to practice one of their traditional public rituals undisturbed. Hence the social repercussions were profound.

This examination will shed light on the approach of early Islamic pietists to the problem of women’s ritual action and the relationship between the sexes. In doing so, it makes a contribution to the history of gender. Virtually no scholarship exists on the ritual practices of early Islamic women.[5] As a result, our notions about gender relations, about women’s sphere of action, and about the historical changes and continuities that operated during the early Islamic period have remained underdeveloped. This chapter will also reveal how, insofar as gender relations are concerned, the early Islamic process of socialization unfolded differently in different cities. In particular it will show that, in an endeavor to restrict women’s public rites, the funerary laws of the Mesopotamian garrison city of Kūfa, where traditionists and jurists flourished, came to differ markedly from the funerary laws of Medina, the city in Arabia where the prophet Muḥammad died. This result will in turn provide insight into the transformation of social ideology that occurred as the center of gravity of Islamic civilization shifted from the Arabian to the Mesopotamian environment. In one of the Muslim garrison cities of Mesopotamia, male pietists advocated oral traditions harking back to Muḥammad’s age, with the intention of circumscribing the role of women in death rituals. Surprisingly, these innovative traditions diverged not only from Medinese traditions. They also marked a departure from the Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian approaches to the issue of women’s participation in funerals. These distinctions will prove significant to our understanding of the connection between the rise of Islam and the fate of women.

The Birth of Tragedy in al-Jāhiliyya

Wailing for the dead was a dramatic form of expressing bereavement. Women would scream *wā rajulāh, wā jabalāh, wā `nqiṭā‘a ẓahrāh,* for example, meaning “Oh, the man! Oh, the mountain! Oh, the severance from his household!” This was a poetic form, rhyming after a fashion, lamenting the separation of the beloved person from his environment.[6]

The rite of wailing (*niyāḥa*) encompassed not only this oral lament (*nadb*) but also physiological reactions to the announcement of death. It involved tearing hair and drawing blood. A witness to such physical violence would at times encourage the tribe’s wailing women to bear their tragedy with patience. With the throes of death almost gripping him, the poet Labīd admonished his daughters to mourn him for only a year and not to scratch their cheeks, as was customary, or to pull at their hair.[7] Al-Khansā’, the most famous of the elegiac poets of *al-Jāhiliyya* and archaic Islam, would counsel no such restraint. Prayer for one of her deceased brothers seemed a stingy and trivial response that paled in comparison to what she desired as solace: the tearing of garments at the breast by the female wailers.[8]

On special occasions, the violent ritual culminated in the sacrifice of a camel. If the beast was slaughtered, it was known as an *‘aqīra;* its neck, the choice part, would often be devoured in a communal feast. If the camel was sacrificed or left to starve near the grave, it was known as a *baliyya.* The mass camel graves discovered by Arabian archaeologists likely represent collections of sacrificed animals. It is unclear whether the Arabs considered these camels expiatory sacrifices, generous gifts, vehicles for the afterlife, or the inalienable possessions of a tribesman. What is interesting, in connection with the ritual of wailing, is that the slaughter of a young camel would provoke its mother to utter a plaintive cry, which would resonate with the sorrowful human voices.[9]

Some of the bereft were overcome by a profound and abiding pessimism, reflected in the poetry of lament. The poetic elegy (*marthiya*) concealed with a thin veil the fervor and passion of spontaneous laments. Here lay its power. Inspiration for some poems arrived at the funerary ceremony, spontaneously.[10] Yet by and large the best poems were the slow product of *dhikr* or memory, whose activity, *tadhakkur,* must be understood as a vigorous, wearisome, and melancholic exercise in remembering the deceased as well as the injustice of it all. Thus, with her eyes already appearing as if afflicted by disease (*ʻuwwār*), al-Khansā' pressed on with the inexorable contemplation of her brother Ṣakhr's death. She would wake up in the morning, miserable, and ponder the irreparable loss (*ruzʼ*) both to humankind and to *jinn,* the class of desert demons.[11] The grief-stricken Laylā al-Akhyaliyya did likewise for her beloved outlaw, Tawba, composing poems about him on multiple occasions. As a result of *tadhakkur,* the poets attained insomnia, a sense of overwhelming grief (*jazaʻ*), and such tremendous anguish (*bathth*) that they wished repeatedly for the deliverance of death.

Men's poetic laments were more contained than women's.[12] Whereas women were expected to display their emotion in public, men were to command self-restraint. This too was a burden. Durayd ibn al-Ṣimma divorced his wife as a result of her reproaching him for excessive grief over the death of his brother, with whom the poet as a suckling infant had shared the breasts of a foster mother.[13] "So I am not aggrieved since fate parted us," declaimed Labīd with admirable fortitude, "for every young man is one day made miserable by fate."[14] "Obstinate condolement" precipitated by death unavenged, for the Arab poets as for Hamlet, could deteriorate one's self to a state of "unmanly grief." Confessions of private, sleepless bereavement were infrequent. "My pretense of endurance," Abū Dhu'ayb al-Hudhalī exclaimed, intent on mastering his emotions with masculine forbearance, "is for those gloating at another's misfortune. I will show them that I will not be ruined on account of the fickleness of fate."[15] Only in rare moments could the bereft find philosophical consolation in the realization that Fate and the Fortunes—*al-Dahr* and *al-Manāyā*—ruled the world by fickle blows, as wind upon traces of sand.

Women turned violent against themselves, drawing blood from their own cheeks. Men channeled their violence outwardly. These mechanisms of coping with disaster were interdependent, as retaliation for murder and pleas for vengeance followed one another in the circle of rage. Indeed, the poetic laments of women often called for *witr,* or blood revenge, their cries as if seeking to quench the suffering of a thirsty owl.[16] Murder unrequited by blood or blood-wit (*diya*), in tribal warring societies, was a matter of grave injustice. Laylā al-Akhyaliyya shamed Qābiḍ for his failure to protect her beloved robber.[17] In a poem reproaching the son of a paternal uncle and others for not defending Ṣakhr, al-Khansā’ declaimed:

May there be no sleep ’til you drive your morose horses, casting colts and fillies away, as a miscarriage.…
Or wash away from yourselves the disgrace that covered you, like the menstruating women [who wash out] the menstrual blood during days of purity.[18]

That wailing was an art dominated by women is well known. What has not been properly understood is why raging lament in *al-Jāhiliyya* and archaic Islam took the form that it did. Toward this end we must consider who wailed for whom from a sociological point of view. A survey of early seventh-century poems of lament suggests that most wailers were widows (*armala*), sometimes joined in the rites by unmarried women (*‘adhārā*) and by one’s neighbors (*jār*). Generally, wailing was directed at a “young” man (*fatā*) who was beyond the adolescent stage, often married and with children. The entire tribe may have gathered to hear the laments, but a certain tension existed between the bereft women and the dead man’s tribe (*ḥayy*). Poetic elegies for dead women did not exist or did not survive canonization.[19] The not-so-young men who were the objects of lament were almost invariably praised for their generosity. The profile of generosity can be dismissed as a topos of the genre only at the risk of misunderstanding its dynamic motor, for the women themselves often reflected on the destitution (*‘usra*) and the loss of property (*māl*) precipitated by the death of their protector. This dispossession would affect the orphans and widows who had benefited from the spoils of his booty. It would affect most poignantly the wife and unmarried daughters of the deceased. Janūb al-Hudhaliyya’s lament for her brother ‘Amr Dhu `l-Kalb, apparently devoured by leopards while sleeping in a cave, contains a haunting image: “As if unaware of him, the men evict his women as the tents are furnished for brides.”[20] When a widow, once expelled from her deceased husband’s tent, consoled a newly bereft wife, she had good reasons to show her empathy and rage.

Reactions to a Ritual of Mourning

In the new Islamic order, traditional acts of mourning such as crying out loudly, throwing dust on one’s head, and tearing one’s hair appeared abhorrent and were proscribed. “An invocation of woe and destruction” seemed tantamount to obscenity. “The plaintive groan and the snort," claimed Muslim pietists, "came from the devil."[21] By wailing, they admonished, women risked exposing Muslim homes to evil. Thus, according to one of their oral traditions, Muḥammad warned his future wife Umm Salama (d. 678/679) that, were she to allow a woman to help her cry for her deceased husband, Abū Salama (d. 625), she would invite the devil into her house.[22] Wailers were ostracized. Though not exiled from society, they were excluded from belonging to the imagined community of Muslims destined for salvation. According to an oral tradition, the Prophet had said, "The one who tears at the garment [to expose] the breasts, and strikes at her cheeks, and calls by the invocation of *al-Jāhiliyya* is not one of us."[23] In another version of the maxim, the Prophet maintains that "the one who shaves is not one of us, nor is the one who lacerates the skin, nor is the one who tears [her clothes], nor is the one who supplicates by woe and destruction."[24] Indeed, the Prophet cursed (*la'ana*) the wailer and determined that her art was *kufr,* blasphemy. Angels would pray neither for the wailer nor for the lamenter. If a wailer died unrepentant, she would be resurrected like the polytheists on Judgment Day, wearing a coat of mail made of tar or an armor either infected with scabies or set ablaze with fire.[25]

Why did early Islamic pietists find the wailing of women offensive? In their rationale, wailing was an act of complaining against the judgment of God, a manner of rebelling with exasperation against His decree.[26] The shock of death ought rather to be accepted with a sense of patience and resignation—with *Ṣabr,* a pre-Islamic virtue transformed in the Islamic context to encompass fortitude in the face of troubling and inexplicable events precipitated by the incomprehensible wisdom of God (see fig. 4.1).[27]

Early Muslim laws on mourning concentrate on the repression of violent emotions of bereavement. Jurists and traditionists had surprisingly little to relate by way of positive injunctions on mourning; their discourse dwells on one aspect of mourning (wailing or *niyāḥa*) negatively, without regulating in much detail any other aspect of the work of mourning (*iḥdād*). In its civilizing process, Islamic law imposed no taboos on the male kin of the deceased and but the most minimal set of taboos on the female kin. Women following Sunni law were discouraged from displaying the signs of mourning (*iḥdād*). In its civilizing process, Islamiclaw imposed no taboos on the male kin of the deceased and but the most minimal set of taboos on the female kin. Women following Sunni law were discouraged from displaying the signs of mourning (*iḥdād*) for a brother or child for more than three days beyond the moment of death. At this time, they would mark the return to normalcy by requesting a yellow perfume (*ṣufra*) and applying it to their cheeks and forearms. Widows, exceptionally, would need to wait for a period of four months and ten days—a period known as the *ʻidda*—before using this perfume to celebrate their availability for remarriage.[28] As for men, they were not required by law to alter their behavior in any way after the death of parents, wives, or children.

Pietists knew that their mourning restrictions were light in comparison to the measures of social exclusion that certain men and women imposed upon themselves. Thus a tradition critical of a Shīʻite woman's way of mourning tells of the long vigil of the wife of ʻAlī's grandson, al-Ḥasan. She built a domed structure (*qubba*) over the grave of her husband, dwelling there for an entire year.[29] Though usually succinct, Mālik relates a long story about a bereft Israelite husband in his chapter on funerary rites, under the heading "All About Managing in Misfortune" (*jāmiʻ al-ḥisba fi `l-muṣība*). Al-Qāsim ibn Muhammad told Mālik, ‘A wife of mine passed away, and Muḥammad ibn Kaʻb al-Quraẓī [an authority on *ḥadīth*] came to me to console me for her loss [*yuʻazzīnī bihā*]."

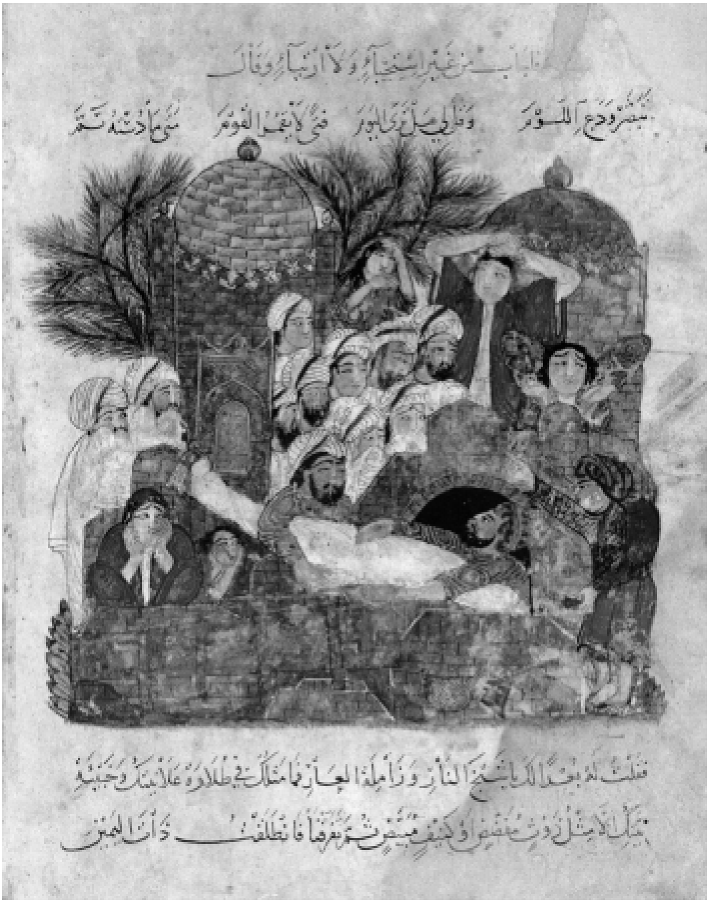

Figure 4.1 Desperate women and mournful men, in an illustration of the eleventh assembly of al-Ḥarīrīs *Maqāmāt.* This painting

accompanies a tale about a funeral in the city of Sāweh. Heeding the oral tradition that encourages visiting the tombs as a cure for hardness of heart, the sojourner al-Ḥārith decides to attend a stranger's burial. At the cemetery, he listens to a moving sermon by an old man, the shameless Abū Zayd, who hoards alms for preaching about sorrow and death. Dated to 1237, this illustration by Yaḥyā al-Wāsiṭī does not represent an early Islamic scene. In fact, the domed tombs in the background reflect a pompous aesthetic antithetical to early Islamic sensibilities. Yet the representation of emotions by the artist captures, as if by cognitive consonance, an early Islamic scene. We see five women, in red and blue robes at the edges of the congregation, digging their fingernails into their cheeks, tearing out their hair, or rending their garments to expose the flesh between their breasts. Their wild gestures are set in contrast to the postures of submissive restraint and self-contained resignation characteristic of the men. Source: Ms. Arabe 5847, F 29v. Photo by courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Reproduced with permission.

> He said, "There was a man from the Banū Isrāʾīl, a man learned in law [*faqīh*], knowledgeable, devout, and capable of reasoning critically about legal problems [*mujtahid*]. He had a wife. He was smitten with her and loved her, but she died. He became extremely angry at her and endured sorrow against her, so that he retreated into a house and locked himself in, veiled from the people. No one was able to enter his house."[30]

Eventually, the bereft Israelite found consolation in the notion that his precious wife belonged to God and that to Him she had returned.[31] What is striking, in a comparative context, is that Islamic law did not prescribe a single sign of mourning for men, no matter their proximity to the deceased.[32] For this reason, Muslims found Confucian restrictions on bereft women and men exceedingly strange. As the author of *Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa `l-Hind* reported, the Chinese "cry over their dead for three years, and those who do not cry are struck with a piece of wood. It is this way both for women and men!"[33] That the Chinese enforced a prolonged period of crying for the dead struck Muslims as odd because, in their experience, the law worked to discourage excessive lamentation for the dead.

Though they aspired toward a sublime state of equanimity, pietists did not try to ban all emotional responses to death. Crying in moderation seemed fine or at least inevitable. Certain oral traditions, al-Tirmidhī concluded, could be interpreted as granting a "concession" (*rukhṣa*) enabling silent crying.[34] Tears for the dead seemed useless but were not banned. Jābir ibn ‘Abdallāh recalled that when he wept after the death of his father, the Prophet did not forbid him.[35] “God does not punish by the tearing of the eye nor by the grief of the heart,” declared Muḥammad. He punishes only for oral expressions of bereavement.[36] Muḥammad himself was deeply affected by the death of loved ones. As death was about to seize his grandson, his daughter summoned him. Instead of heeding her, he sent her a message declaring, “What God takes and what He gives belongs to Him, and everyone with Him has a determined time of death [*ajal musammā*], so let her be patient and resigned [*wa`l-taḥtasib*].” Eventually, God’s Messenger agreed to visit his dying grandson. Seeing the child with his very being (*nafsuhu*) issuing a rattling noise described by an awful-sounding verb, *tataqa‘qa‘u,* his eyes overflowed. “What is this?” Sa’d ibn ‘Ubāda asked. “It is a mercy that God created in the hearts of His slaves,” Muḥammad replied defensively.[37]

Pietists understood how difficult it was for the bereft to master their emotions. Frustration is palpable in *aḥadīth* related by al-Bukhārī under the heading “Whoever sits down in the face of a calamity, grief (*ḥuzn*) is recognized in him.” The Prophet showed just such a sign of sorrow, which ‘Ā’isha discovered by spying on him through a chink in the door (*ṣā’ir al-bāb*), after receiving news that Zayd ibn Ḥāritha, Ja‘far (ibn Abī Ṭālib), and (‘Abdallāh) Ibn Rawāḥa had died while campaigning beyond the Byzantine frontier in 629. A man came by to report that Ja‘far’s womenfolk were crying. The Prophet ordered him to repress their lament. The man returned a second, then a third time, complaining that the women “by God, overpowered us” (*ghalabnanā*). Losing all composure, the Messenger responded—or so ‘Ā’isha alleged (*za‘amat*)—”So scatter dust in their mouths!” ‘Ā’isha herself was rather displeased with the man, among other reasons for vexing the Prophet and burdening him with anxiety (*‘anā’*).[38] The tradition shows Muḥammad weeping indoors, if not secretly, and thus doubly frustrated with the women who wailed openly. The tragedy, to pietistic sensibilities, was that women who made no attempt to temper their emotions in the face of death shook Muḥammad’s mood of stoic resignation.

Besides their theological insistence on the need to accept God’s decree with forbearance, pietists had other reasons for reacting against wailing for the dead. They opposed the ritual as part of their campaign against pomp. Alongside poetry, iconographie representations, the display of womanly charms, lions’ hides, gold, and silk, lamentation was deemed unlawful (*muḥarram*).[39] Since professional wailers cost money, their services were evidently identified, along with the other items in this odd list, as superfluous expenditures. One jurist would declare that “the hiring of a wailer and her earnings are unlawful.”[40] Reformers who campaigned against the use of candles, silken shrouds, and such funerary pomp also detested the hiring of professional mourners.[41] However, they were not deeply concerned by this funerary expense, if only because Arab wailing for the dead was, for the most part, conducted gratis by wives, sisters, daughters, and neighbors. Thus, objections to superfluous expenditures do not fully explain the campaign against wailing.

Certain pietists opposed not merely wailing but more generally the public gatherings of mourners at the home of the deceased. “We used to consider the gathering at the deceased man’s family and the preparation of food after his burial,” said Jarīr ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Bajalī (d. ca. 671), one of the youngest Helpers of the Prophet, “as belonging to the category of wailing.”[42] This assembly was considered, due to its very association with wailing, execrable. Indeed, the jurist al-Shāfi‘ī (767–820) made clear his loathing for a ceremony known as the *ma’tam,* a commemorative repast. This ceremony involved the provision of food and consolation the day after the burial as well as on several occasions afterward. It allowed the relatives and female neighbors to assemble in commemoration of the deceased. Al-Shāfi‘ī disliked this repast “notwithstanding what has been transmitted regarding it in the traditions [of the sayings and practices of the Prophet]” and “even if there was no weeping for them.” The ceremony allowed the formation of “a community” (*jamā‘a*) that would “renew the sorrow” and thereby risk eroding that thin layer of patience and resignation in the face of death.[43]

Pietists began to associate wailing intimately with *al-Jāhiliyya,* the age of barbarism and wild acts. They represented wailing as one of three or four uncivilized, pre-Islamic acts whose practice continued, unfortunately, after the rise of Islam.[44] Needless to say, however much the ritual of wailing corresponded to actual pre-Islamic practice, it became to a certain degree the construct of Muslim ideologues interested in defining, by opposition, the ideal Islamic ritual.[45] In the ideal ritual of the best of worlds, Muslims would walk toward the cemetery in contemplative silence, pondering death. The Meccan jurist ‘Aṭā’ (d. 734/735), his contemporary from Baṣra al-Ḥasan (d. 728/729), the Damascene al-Awzā‘ī (d. 774), and many other pietists found disturbing the raising of the voice (*ruf‘ al-Ṣawt*) during the funeral procession.[46] Similarly bothered by such irreligious noise at funerals, the Baṣran jurist Abū Qilāba (d. ca. 722) exclaimed, “they [that is, the venerable ancestors] used to glorify the dead with reverential gravity” (*sakīna*).[47] In his book on asceticism, Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 797) held that the Companions of the Prophet used to recommend silence during funeral processions, during battle, and during recitations of the Qur’ān.[48]

Silence, haste, and austerity characterized funeral processions of the sort envisaged by Muslim pietists. Such simple processions seemed most appropriate because they could easily be performed in the same way for a pauper or a rich man who died in any Islamic city between Cordoba and Rayy. Jurists and traditionists valued social order and ritual uniformity. They endeavored to regulate virtually all aspects of death rites, from the number of times that a corpse needed to be washed in the genital area to the precise direction in which a corpse needed to face before it could receive the prescribed funeral prayer from the designated Imam. At the cemetery, the community of mourners interceding on behalf of the deceased would stand lined up in neat rows, and they would raise their hands to praise God at the right time, on cue. All of this was an ideal scheme frustrated by the reality of wailing women, whose spontaneous poetry and unpredictable behavior epitomized the chaos of "pre-Islamic" times.

Armed with all these reasons against wailing, pietists challenged the ritual in a number of ways, though not always effectively. First, they propagated a threat in the guise of a prophetic saying: "The dead is tortured in his grave by the wailing on his behalf."[49] This form of torture refers to *'adhāb al-qabr,* the punishment of spirit and corpse in the grave. According to the scheme, whenever a woman wailed, angels would pounce on the deceased with a burning iron rod.[50] This threat was not fully thought out, however, since it violated the Qur'ānic principle that each person is held responsible for his or her own works, not for those of others.[51]

Pietists attacked wailing also by claiming that women seeking allegiance to Islam had pledged to Muḥammad that they would desist from practicing the ritual. In truth, nowhere does the Qur'ān, in its commemoration of the women's pledge, explicitly condemn the practice of wailing. (As a matter of fact, wailing is nowhere mentioned in the Qur'ān.) According to *Sūra* 60:12, the believing women pledged not to associate any deity with Allah; to refrain from theft, adultery, and slander; not to murder their children; and "not to disobey" the Prophet in *ma'rūf*. This last term, *ma'rūf,* is obscure and purposely vague. It means "what is known to be good" or "what is accepted by tradition." In certain oral traditions, Qur'ānic exegetes from Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean world explained that in choosing this term, the prophet Muḥammad specifically had wailing in mind.[52] In other words, according to this rather creative interpretation of the Qur'ān, when the Prophet made the women pledge not to disobey him in their traditional duties, the women were actually pledging not to wail at someone's death.

Aside from warning that tears would bring forth tortures in the afterlife and reminding women of the pledge not to wail, what could a pietist do against wailers? He might refuse to enter a house of wailing if asked to wash and perfume a Muslim's corpse there, in preparation for burial.[53] Similarly, if asked to lead the funerary prayer, then, in the capacity of Imam, he could refuse to offer his services until the congregation should submit in silence to his idea of order. Indeed, 'Aṭā' (d. 734/735), the famous jurist from Mecca, did just so. He warned the wailers, "Shut up or I will turn back!" They refused to heed him, so he left the funeral without honoring the deceased.[54]

All of these reactions to the ritual were relatively peaceful. Yet certain pietists argued that women should be punished severely for wailing. This violent approach to the ritual can best be illustrated by an anecdote about caliph 'Umar I and the wailers. At the death of the famous conqueror Khālid ibn al-Walīd, around 641 or 642, women gathered to cry for the deceased hero in the house of Maymūna (d. 680/681), one of Muḥammad's wives. A caliph known for his zeal and vigor, 'Umar I ordered one of the Prophet's Companions, Ibn 'Abbās (d. 687), to enter Maymūna's house and bring the women out. He then began to strike at the wailers with a whip. A woman's veil dropped. "Commander of the Believers, her veil!" someone cried out. "Leave it alone," responded the caliph, "for she is not at all sacrosanct."[55]

This oral tradition was recorded in the "Book on Funerary Practice" compiled by 'Abd al-Razzāq (744–827) long after the purported event. Its historicity must be doubted, for the gap between the death of Khālid in 641 or 642 and the written record spans several generations. According to the preamble, 'Abd al-Razzāq heard the story from Ibn 'Uyayna (Sufyān, 725–814), a Kūfan transmitter who moved to Mecca in 780, where he heard the tradition from the Meccan traditionist 'Amr ibn Dīnār (d. 744).[56] Even if we choose to believe this history of oral transmission, we would still have reasons to suspect the veracity of the anecdote. The story may simply have served to commemorate in an imaginative way the legendary enmity between 'Umar and Khālid, given that the caliph had demoted and eventually deposed the conqueror.[57] Furthermore, because it formed part of a passionate legal discourse directed against the ritual of wailing for the dead, the account was anything but unbiased. It celebrated the action of a pious if overzealous caliph, not of the riotous wailers.[58]

In the anecdote about caliph 'Umar I and the wailers, we observe a violent attack against Muslim women performing this traditional ritual of death inside a home, as if in retreat. The virulence of the attack may surprise us, but this in itself would not strike an early Muslim audience as unusual. Violence against mourning women occurred often in early Islamic times, and with religious sanction. The prophet Muḥammad himself, as we have seen, once ordered a man to scatter dust in the mouths of wailing women. What made the story noteworthy, in the

Islamic context, was the fact that ‘Umar I had extended the Islamic campaign against the gatherings of female mourners into the domestic sphere. Reference to the fallen veil only underscored the notion that the caliph’s whipping assaulted women’s space. The women had forfeited the protection of the home and of the veil by protesting death, violating certain Islamic strictures as their voices resonated in the caliph’s realm.

Padlocking the Women in Kūfa

This struggle against wailing, so far presented in general terms, was not carried out with equal zeal and righteous conviction by all pietists everywhere in the Islamic world. It is important to realize that Kūfan and Medinese traditions reveal divergent approaches. So do Sunni and Shīʿite traditions, on the one hand, and all-male and mixed-gender traditions, on the other hand. These distinctions are significant because they show how the early Islamic tradition became ideologically differentiated in relation to women’s rites.

The campaign against wailing unfolded with the greatest intensity in the city of Kūfa.[59] Iraqi jurists in general were stringent in their opposition to wailing and rather reluctant to allow women to congregate, with or without wailing. A series of Kūfan men alongside women converted to their cause continued to uphold the authenticity of the oral tradition connecting tears to torture in the grave, even though they understood it contradicted a basic tenet of the Qur’ān. The Kūfan authority who related this tradition, Abū Mūsa (al-Ash‘arī, d. ca. 663), and God’s Messenger would not say anything untrue, they argued stubbornly.[60] In a chapter entitled “On the Hindering of Women from Following Processions,” ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 827) made it clear how women could be prevented from participating in this ritual. On the authority of the Kūfan jurist (Sufyān) al-Thawrī (d. 778), the Kūfan traditionist Manṣūr (ibn al-Mu‘tamir, d. 749), and the Kūfan jurist Ibrāhīm (al-Nakha‘ī, d. 715), he reported that ancestors “used to padlock women indoors” before the men would depart for funerary processions. Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 849) reported similar traditions about locking women behind closed doors, also on the basis of eighth-century Kūfan authorities.[61]

In several reports, traditionists associated the “going out of women for funeral processions” (*khurūj al-nisā’ ‘ala `l-janā’iz*) with temptation or civil strife (*fitna*), blameworthy innovation (*bid‘a*), and that which is prohibited (*manhīy*) or unlawful (*muḥarram*) .[62] Several of these oral traditions concern the words and deeds of the prophet Muḥammad, who supposedly forbade women from stepping outside so as to accompany biers. One tradition that circulated in the Kūfan milieu tells of a confrontational encounter between Muḥammad and a woman who is portrayed in one version as extremely old (*‘ajūz*). Muhammad stops the funeral procession in its tracks and commands that the bedstead (*sarīr*) on which the deceased is being transported toward the cemetery be placed on the ground. He then orders the woman to turn back and refuses to continue with the funerary ceremony until she disappears behind Medina’s reed huts (*akhṣāṣ*).[63]

Kūfan traditionists celebrated the actions against women of the Kūfan pietist Masrūq (ibn al-Ajda‘, d. 682). By their reckoning, Masrūq did more than simply transmit oral traditions about Muḥammad’s opposition to the presence of women at funerals. He threw dust in women’s faces whenever they tried to walk alongside the bier and, if they insisted on taking part in the procession, he would refuse to pray for the deceased and even abandon the proceedings. This was a man bent on making oral traditions socially effective.[64]

The oral traditions transcribed by ‘Abd al-Razzāq and by his counterpart Ibn Abī Shayba, so strikingly hostile to the participation of women in the funerary procession, were reported overwhelmingly by Kūfan men. In light of their transmission history, it is likely that they were already in circulation by the first half of the eighth century.[65] A small number of the traditions in question were related by transmitters from Baṣra in Mesopotamia, Mecca in the Ḥijāz, and Ṣan‘ā’ in the Yemen, yet what is surprising is the near-absence of Medinese transmitters.

A rare Medinese tradition that features male and female links in the chain of transmission differs markedly in tone from the Kūfan traditions. “Would that God’s Messenger had seen the women on that day when he forbade us from departing [from our homes to take part in funeral processions],” lamented Muḥammad’s wife ‘Ā’isha (d. 678). The Medinese woman ‘Amra (bint ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, d. ca. 716) related this saying to the Medinese Ismā‘īl ibn Abī Umayya (‘Amr ibn Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Ās, d. ca. 750), who in turn related it to Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid (d. ca. 770), the Baṣran immigrant to Ṣan‘ā’.[66] This tradition with Medinese links stands in sharp contrast to the all-male Kūfan ones because of its relatively sympathetic approach to women who have been deprived by prophetic decree from their traditional right to take part in funeral processions.

So as to distinguish further the Medinese from the Kūfan discourse, let us turn our attention to the *Muwaṭṭa’,* a compendium of traditions by Medina’s most prominent jurist, Mālik (d. 795). Nowhere does the *Muwaṭṭa’* draw sharp distinctions between men and women in regard to the funerary procession.[67] As a matter of fact, Mālik himself did not find funeral processions in mixed company bothersome, as reported by the jurist Saḥnūn (d. 855): “Did Mālik allow women to exit with funeral processions? Yes, Mālik said it is not problematic that a woman follow the procession of her off spring or parent, and similarly with respect to her husband and sister whenever it is known that someone like her would go out [in the funeral procession] of someone like him.”[68]

The funeral in honor of ‘Ā’isha, Muḥammad’s beloved wife, held during Ramaḍān of the year 678, was probably typical for Medina in that it included a mixed crowd of men and women.[69] Jurists from Mālik’s school of law would uphold to a high degree Mālik’s legacy, ruling that both men and women may join the procession and walk together in front of the bier. However, they would endeavor to reduce mingling (*ikhtilāṭ*) between the sexes, an issue that may not have concerned Mālik. By suggesting that men should march in front, women behind, they would envisage a community divided according sex. Significantly, however, a place for women was reserved in this ideal community.[70]

Like the Kūfans and other early Muslim authorities, Mālik disapproved of the rites of wailing. When asked about the women who tore at their breasts in lamenting for the dead, he pronounced, “What an evil that is done!” Abhorrent and infuriating though he found the ritual, he nevertheless ruled: “Over this matter no one has power other than the *sulṭān,”* that is, the local governmental authority.[71] Men of religion, in this Medinese formulation, had no business taking direct action against violent wailers unless they were empowered to do so by the government. In this light, the measures against women of overzealous traditionists such as the Kūfan Masrūq seem unjustified.

One could argue that the Kūfan traditions working to hinder women from joining funerary processions were pietistic fabrications aiming to transform society, not genuine traditions conveying the original customs of Medina. Three important reasons could be advanced for doubting their authenticity. First, the authorities supporting the traditions were primarily from Kūfa, not Medina. Second, our most important source for Medinese traditions (Mālik’s *Muwaṭṭa’*) contains none against women joining funerary processions. Third, the Medinese jurist Mālik ruled in favor of women following processions, a judgment he would not have reached had he considered (Kūfan) oral traditions against this institution legitimate.

It is possible, then, that Kūfan men forged several of the traditions commemorating violent actions against wailers. The significance of this discussion does not lie in the field of source criticism, however, for it is well known that now and then traditionists’ memories failed. What matters is the light these traditions throw on the social ideology of early Islamic pietists from Kūfa and specifically on their approach to women’s ritual action. Regardless of the questions that may arise about the authenticity of the sources, what can be established without a doubt is that Kūfan transmitters were uniquely interested in relating traditions portraying zealous actions against women wishing to join funeral processions. Most telling is the divergence between Kūfan and Medinese attitudes toward mixed funeral processions. While a key Medinese authority, Mālik, considered such events unproblematic, certain Kūfan pietists celebrated the locking of women behind closed doors. The fact that Kūfans disproportionately related such traditions indicates that they were not merely transmitting, as scholars or antiquarians, innocuous memories of the past. Rather, they were engaged in the more ambitious project of shaping collective memories and building an ideology of praxis.

Kūfan transmitters, these arbiters of memory, circulated their traditions in the real world, where funerals were held, and surely they hoped their words would have consequence. Once their traditions were canonized in authoritative books and gained the status of ritual law, they did succeed in transforming funerary form, at least to some degree and in certain circles. This happened in the first place because the Kūfan vision was promoted by two of the four founders of Sunni schools of law, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) and Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855).[72] Abū Ḥanīfa, himself of Kūfa, heard an elder exclaim on the Prophet’s authority, “Let women not be present at funerals, lest they try the living and harm the dead.” Similarly, in an answer to a query, Ibn Ḥanbal of Baghdad ruled: “The woman must not depart for the cemeteries, nor for other places.”[73] Thanks to these influential endorsements of the Kūfan vision, prayer leaders eager to follow the directives of Abū Ḥanīfa or Ibn Ḥanbal would do everything within their power to dissuade women from joining funeral processions. In this endeavor they were eventually supported by the *muḥtasib,* the official enforcer of public morals, charged with lashing out at women raising their voices at funerals.[74]

It is worth remarking, if only in passing, that nowadays women rarely attend these events, even in progressive Muslim countries. The funeral in honor of King Hussein of Jordan, for instance, was “almost entirely a male affair,” according to the *New York Times.* Apparently palace officials discouraged women from joining the event “in deference to Muslim traditions.” The king’s widow, Queen Noor, and other women of the royal family “were nowhere in sight.” They “were seen only as the day began, at the door of the family home.”[75] Evidently the particular vision of the Kūfan men has triumphed over the alternative vision of the Medinese. However, let us not dwell here on so recent a past.

In tone, the traditions from Mecca and Ṣan‘ā’, as well as some of those from Baṣra, resemble the Kūfan ones. According to reports, some of them with Kūfan links in the chain of transmission, the Meccan pietist Mujāhid (d. 722) refused to participate in funerals that included female singers or wailers.[76] Similarly, the tradition about ʻUmar I and the wailers was associated with both Kūfan and Meccan transmitters. Ḥammām ibn Nāfiʻ of Ṣanʻā' reported that the early convert from the Yemen, Wahb (ibn Munabbih, d. 728), engaged in activities to ensure that funerals would become single-sex affairs.[77] In Baṣra, al-Ḥasan (d. 728) and Muḥammad (ibn Sīrīn, d. 728) found repugnant the following of biers by women, according to Hishām (ibn Ḥassān al-Azdī, d. ca. 765).[78] All-male Baṣran traditions represent a milder, attenuated version of the severe Kūfan stance, yet they similarly stand in opposition to the presence of women at funerals.

Any resemblance between all-male Kūfan and all-male Baṣran traditions is unsurprising, given the shared history of these cities as Muslim garrisons in Mesopotamia. What is striking, however, is the propinquity between Kūfan and Meccan traditions, as well as the corresponding distance between Meccan and Medinese traditions. Why do the traditions of the two cities of the Ḥijāz not resemble each other? Perhaps because the tribes of Mecca and Medina were not equally patriarchal. Muslim tradition does distinguish between the two cities insofar as women's behavior is concerned. Angry at the temerity of Medinese wives, who screamed back at their husbands, caliph ʻUmar I supposedly lamented: "We, the company of Quraysh [the elite Meccan tribe], used to dominate women. But then [as a result of the Hijra], we came to the Helpers [of Medina], a people dominated by their women. Consequently our women began to adopt the manner of the [Medinese] Helpers."[79] It is difficult to believe that Medina and its Helpers tended toward matriarchy as much as Mecca and the Quraysh did toward patriarchy. Yet it is not unlikely that, from town to town and from tribe to tribe, variations in gender relations existed in western Arabia. Regardless, another possibility for the discrepancy between Meccan and Medinese traditions must be considered: it concerns the Kūfan-Medinese divide. Once it became clear that Kūfans and Medinese held divergent approaches to wailing women, the Kūfans seeking an Arabian foundation for their construction may have projected a few of their own traditions backward to Meccan authorities. Whether or not these traditions truly originated in Mecca, what requires explanation is the depth of Kūfan interest in transmitting a multiplicity of traditions against wailing women.

Why did an extreme reaction to women's role in funerals arise in early Islamic Kūfa? One compelling explanation that comes to mind is rooted in the particular history and topography of Kūfa. This city was divided into tribal quarters, and each quarter had its own cemetery (*jabbāna*). These tribal cemeteries functioned not only as burial grounds, but also as the places where rebels gathered to launch and organize revolts against the state. They were, in other words, spaces of sedition and civil disorder—of *fitna,* a term closely associated with the activities of wailing women, who protested the death of individuals including rebels and spurred the tribe to avenge the dead.[80] The Kūfans were particularly anxious about the rites of wailing women, and their city frequently experienced periods of turbulence, especially in the period between the battle of Karbalā’ in 680 and the end of al-Mukhtār’s revolt in 687. On these occasions, rebels sympathetic to the cause of the family of ‘Alī, whom we could simply call proto-Shī‘ites, rankled the Umayyad caliphate.[81] In this light, the Kūfan attempt to ban women from funerals appears grounded in the proto-Sunni endeavor to prevent wailers from igniting rebellion. Perhaps, then, Kūfan traditions against the presence of women at funerals were on occasion directed polemically against proto-Shī‘ites, beginning sometime after 680 with the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn. It was in commemoration of al-Ḥusayn’s death that Shī‘ites would eventually begin to hold their yearly passion play.[82]

This last explanation of the reasons for the extreme Kūfan stance invites us to examine Shī‘ite attitudes toward wailing women. Shī‘ites, whose religion has been described as the prototypical “religion of lament,” were considerably more sympathetic to wailers than Sunnis. Shī‘ite laws on such matters as marriage and divorce generally favored women more than did Sunni laws, so one should perhaps expect a greater appreciation of women’s rites in the Shī‘ite tradition than in the Sunni.[83] Shī‘ite books of law—of the Twelver, Ismā‘īli, and Zaydi sects—do record opposition to the practice of violent lament, echoing many of the Sunni traditions. Yet the tone of many of their other traditions is markedly different and rather ambivalent: “Clamoring over the dead is not sound nor is it necessary” declared Abū ‘Abdallāh (Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, d. 765), “but the people do not know it, and forbearance [*ṣabr*] is better.” Tearing one’s garment was deemed merely “unnecessary,” as was clamoring. Yet wailing for the imams was regarded as appropriate, due to their grandeur. Three years of wailing for al-Ḥusayn (d. 680), day and night from the moment of his death, was considered a *sunna kāmila,* or perfect custom.[84] According to a Shī‘ite tradition, the Medinese promised Muṣammad not to wail for the dead without first crying for the mutilated martyr of the battle of Uḥud, Ḥamza. “So they wailed for him and cried,” continues the tradition, “and they remain to this day in accordance to their vow.”[85] This tradition not only indicates that the Medinese had developed a ritual of lamenting for the dead in the name of their local martyr; it also suggests that Muḥammad had sanctioned the custom of wailing for the dead.

Both Sunnis and Shī‘ites agreed that no blow seemed more powerful than the death of a son. The Prophet, it was said, granted a veil from the punishment of fire after death to parents who succeeded in repressing their grief during this kind of tragedy.[86] For their emotional control and unquestioning acceptance of God’s will, Abū Ṭalḥa and his wife were amply rewarded both in this life and in the hereafter. But the death of Ibrahim, the Prophet’s only son, resonated with political significance, in a manner that the death of Abū Ṭalḥa’s son did not. For Ibrahim might have become the Prophet’s heir. His death, according to some, caused the sun to become eclipsed, an astrological connection others would dispute fiercely.[87] At his funeral, everyone burst out wailing, and according to a Shīʿite memory, the men’s voices rose above the women’s (*ḥattā irtafaʿat aṣwāt al-rijāl ʿalā aṣwāt al-nisāʾ*). Sunni oral traditions did not dramatize the event quite in this manner, perhaps because Sunni Muslims found it somewhat less tragic than did Shīʿites that Islamic rule did not continue within the family of the Prophet. According to them, the Prophet allowed the people to weep for his son while the baby was dying, but forbade it the moment he passed away.[88]

Shīʿites looked favorably upon the commemorative repast (*ma’tam*), upholding the custom (*sunna*) of women preparing food for the family struck by the calamity of death (*ahl al-muṣība*) for a period of three days. Abū Ja’far (Muḥammad al-Bāqir, d. ca. 735), it is said, followed the *sunna* when he willed in his last testament for a funeral gathering that would cost eight hundred dirhams.[89] Asked about the wages of the wailer (*ajr al-nā’iḥa*), Ja ‘far al-Ṣādiq said, “There is no problem with it, since the Messenger of God and his family have already been wailed for.”[90] In general, Shīʿite men tolerated wailing rites better than did their Sunni counterparts from Iraq. They understood that the state of patience favored by Sunnis was untenable, a stoic contrivance few temperaments could sustain. Thus they compared the Muslim believer to an egg—one barely kept from cracking on the rocks thanks to the divine creation of *ṣabr.*[91] They recommended that men in distress grip their thigh in order to discharge the inner tension.[92]

Shīʿite books of law rarely address the issue, which so preoccupied Iraqi Sunnis, of whether or not women should assist funeral processions. However, the founder of the Zaydi Imamate in Yemen, Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn, known as al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq (d. 911), did make a telling remark on this matter: “I find it offensive for women to follow the funeral procession. But if it is inevitable, then let them turn to the side and let them be in isolation from the men. They must neither raise their voices in lamentation nor reveal their faces; and as soon as he has been buried, they should depart for their own stations.” To buttress this stance, al-Hādī ilā `l-Ḥaqq reported the opinion of his grandfather, al-Qāsim ibn Ibrahim (d. 860). This early Zaydi authority had remarked that it was not problematic for women to follow funeral processions so long as they remained veiled and separated from the company of men.[93] Such a position cannot be described as permissive. Certainly, it seeks to restrict women's freedom of movement and to prohibit them from practicing their own rituals. Nevertheless, it evinces a studied tolerance for women's presence at funerals. In this Shīʿite formulation, women are not barred from attending funerals, as they were by the Iraqi Sunni traditions.

In sum, then, pietists found wailing disturbing because this ritual was controlled by women whose spontaneous and disorderly action interfered with the emerging Islamic rituals, in particular during the funeral procession and the ceremony of interment. Two separate but interrelated concerns weighed on their minds: the ideal ritual order and the role of women in society. Placing in circulation oral traditions against wailing in order to discourage women from participating in Muslim funerals, proto-Sunni male pietists advanced the most radical solution to these issues. Medinese and Shīʿite pietists, by contrast, did not endeavor to exclude women from funerals and even found wailing tolerable under certain circumstances.

Women in Defense of Lament

For all their attempts to restrain wailing, male pietists in Kūfa and elsewhere waged a losing battle. Even when they were excluded from joining funeral processions and attending burials at the cemetery, wailers still continued practicing their art when news of a death broke out and on the occasion of the funerary meal at the home of the deceased. Thus, Muslim tradition came to represent the rite of wailing not as a custom transformed or eradicated by Islam but as a pre-Islamic institution that had persisted stubbornly despite Islam. According to an oral tradition, the prophet Muḥammad had predicted this dire failure of the civilizing mission of Islam. He had declared that the Muslim community would not abandon four of the uncivilized practices of pre-Islamic times: "glorying in the deeds of one's own ancestors, calumniating the pride of another's genealogical descent, seeking rain by the configuration of the stars, and wailing."[94]

In the same spirit, a twelfth-century spinner of tales, al-Kisāʾī, observed that Eve "bequeathed to her daughters" the habit of wailing "until the Day of the Resurrection." In one form or another the ritual has indeed continued through the ages, in spite of its association with *al-Jāhiliyya,* the uncivilized era preceding the rise of Islam. There is the remarkable testimony, preserved in the Geniza of Cairo, of a Jewish woman stipulating in her testament of 1143 that she be buried to a chorus of Muslim wailers. In the nineteenth century, Orientalists depicted wailers dancing, in the wake of some sheykh's death, "with sticks and lances in their hands, and behaving like furious soldiers." In the twentieth century, Hilma Granqvist, who studied mourning practices in a Jordanian village, observed, "My women were so eager to condemn both shrieking and wailing that, at the moment, I got the impression that this was a custom of bygone days." Later on, she noticed women tearing their dresses and blackening their faces. "A woman takes pride in expressing her violent sorrow," she remarked perceptively, "and she knows it will be spoken of in the village." In an essay examining a funeral that failed to work according to Muslim legal norms, Clifford Geertz argued that Javanese Muslim funerals tend to be "undemonstrative," their function being "to produce a feeling of *iklas,* a kind of willed affectlessness." On one occasion, however, the aunt of the deceased "broke into loud, unrestrained wailing," a ritual expression the anthropologist accounted for by addressing modern tensions, apparently unaware of the medieval view of wailing as an enduring "pre-Islamic" practice. Rarely does one find an ethnographic report specifying that a bout of wailing was successfully stifled. Yet soon after the takeover of Medina by the scripturalist Wahhabi movement, John Lewis Burckhardt observed one instance of wailing defeated by Islamic strictures.[95]

Why did Muslim women continue to wail despite the assault of Islamic pietists? This question cannot easily be answered, because the oral traditions in our possession were selected not by wailers but by those who opposed them, and it is perhaps in vain that we strain to hear their voices. Clearly, different women wailed for different reasons on different occasions. Professional female mourners did it for money, no doubt, even if their personal experiences led them to empathize with the bereft. For the women most directly affected by the death, wailing seemed an appropriate if not an altogether natural response to a grave and fateful blow. It was a stock theme of early Arabic poetry to compare the sorrow of a bereft she-camel weeping her mournful cry over the death of an unweaned camel foal to the grief of a mother losing her son or a sister losing her brother.[96] Surely, in addition, some women wailed because they valued their traditional ritual and struggled to preserve it even in the face of attack.

Women did speak up in defense of their lamentations for the dead. Male pietists had argued that wailing caused the dead to be tortured in their graves. In response, Muḥammad's wife 'Ā'isha contended that the deceased will not be punished in the afterlife for the sins of wailers but only for his or her own offenses. Ibn 'Umar, who had applied the threat against Ḥafṣa when she was crying for 'Umar, is neither a liar nor someone to be accused of lying, 'Ā'isha alleged. But the sense of hearing does err (*al-sam 'yukhṭi'u*). "No, by God, the Messenger of

God never said" what Ibn ʻUmar transmitted, she continued, and certainly not with regard to Muslims. As a matter of fact, the Prophet's statement applied only to a Jewish woman and did not explicitly draw a causal link between weeping and punishment. "They indeed pray for her," the Prophet announced according to ʻĀ'isha, "and she is indeed tortured in her grave."[97]

We possess a remarkable tradition from Baṣra, a Mesopotamian city that, like Kūfa, was first founded as a garrison by the Arab conquerors. This tradition is unusual because, unlike the all-male Kūfan ones analyzed above, it includes both male and female authorities in the chain of transmission. Strikingly, this tradition is not as antagonistic to women's funerary role as either the all-male Kūfan or the all-male Baṣran traditions. According to this tradition's transmission history, (Nusayba) Umm ʻAṭiyya al-Anṣariyya made her declaration to another woman, Ḥafṣa (bint Sīrīn, d. 719), who in turn related it to men such as Ayyūb (ibn Abī Tamīma al-Sakhtiyānī, d. 748) and Hishām (ibn Ḥassān al-Azdī, d. ca. 765). So what did Umm ʻAṭiyya say? "We were forbidden from following biers," she declared, "yet [the prohibition] was not enforced" (*nuhīna ʻan ittibāʻi `l-janā'iz, wa-lam yuʻzam ʻalayna*).[98] In other words, Muḥammad or his Companions had neither firmly established the prohibition nor urgently admonished the women to comply. In this light, an unyielding and vigorous course of action against women who violated this prohibition seemed unjustifiable.

It is essential in this context also to reexamine oral traditions on the women's pledge (already mentioned above) that convey or imagine the women's response, instead of simply narrating the male pietist line. According to these traditions, when the Prophet presented the pledge, one of the women requested an exemption from the clause on wailing. Supposedly she asked Muḥammad for permission to wail with a certain family because "they helped me [wail] during *al-Jāhiliyya,* so it is inevitable that I do likewise for them."[99] It was with such words, presumably, that women defending the practice of wailing sometimes explained why they could not yet commit fully to the pledge. Such a pledge could wait. A Muslim woman might always repent before death. In the meantime, there had been acts of kindness and consolation that could not remain unrequited. To help others cope with grief as one had been helped in the past—this was an essential commitment, a social obligation that could not be broken, though its roots appeared to stretch deeply into the substratum of pre-Islamic civilization.[100]

The Rise of Islam and the Question of Women

"It has been commonly held that Islam has implied the degradation of women,” wrote a scholar in 1928. How, she wondered, did the rise of Islam change women’s situation? Because Islam is a world religion and because the liberties of Muslim women to act in public have to a high degree been restricted in the name of Islam, her question remains at the forefront of gender history.[101] To revisit her question in the present context is essential, given the lack of scholarship on the Islamic approach to women’s rites. Certain scholars have argued that the status of women improved—others that it deteriorated—as a result of changes in Muḥammad’s approach to women.[102] The problem with either position is a lack of evidence. We simply lack a record of datable sixth-and seventh-century sources from Mecca and Medina that would enable us to compare objectively the condition of women before and after Muḥammad‘s lifetime. Consequently we must dismiss this approach, whether of a polemical or apologetic tendency, as based on personal conjecture.

A second position, advanced by several historians, on the connection between gender and the rise of Islam argues that the first Muslims from early seventh-century Mecca and Medina belonged to an egalitarian “republic of virtue.”[103] Men and women in this state were more or less equal in the eyes of the law. But then, as a result of the Arab conquests, Muslims joined the stratified and patriarchal urban societies of Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean world. Naturally, “Islamic society became more like the societies around it,” adopting “their ways.”[104] This development led inexorably to the “legal social dependency and political exclusion” of Muslim women, with Islam changing in a dramatic way as it “assimilated” preexisting modes of male dominance. This “subordination of women and the discrimination practiced against them resulted from the gradual evolution of the social and economic conditions that existed in the Middle East since neolithic times.”[105] An ideological shift accompanied the transition of Islam from the Arabian to the Mesopotamian environment, as Muslims began to interpret the Qur’ān “in a manner that reflected the older cultural value systems.”[106]

The assimilationist model has the advantage of shifting the focus from Arabia to Mesopotamia. Yet it argues for this shift on the basis of an overly simple teleology, one that leaves us wondering what exactly happened to the women of Medina. But the most serious shortcoming of this model is its approach to the problem of historical change. By the light of this model, the position of women in the cities conquered by the Arabs remained unchanged with the rise of Islam, though the religion itself changed dramatically as it borrowed from the older religions and adapted to urban life outside of Arabia. Accordingly, one would expect no substantive differences between the religion of the Muslims of the cities of Mesopotamia and the religion of the Jews, Christians, or

Zoroastrians, the non-Muslims who also lived in these cities. Furthermore, one would expect the history of women in late antiquity to be virtually indistinguishable from the history of women in the early Islamic period. It is true that certain practices associated with Islam, such as veiling, actually originated before the rise of Islam and were popular with non-Muslims. But this and other such examples do not prove that nothing changed for women as a result of the rise of Islam.

As a matter of fact, the patriarchal ideals proposed by eighth-century pietists from the garrison cities of Mesopotamia differed significantly from Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian ones. Muslim pietists from eighth-century Kūfa displayed a novel and unprecedented concern with the segregation of the sexes. They were far keener than their non-Muslim counterparts in limiting the activities of women in public. A brief comparison between Muslim and non-Muslim attitudes toward mourning will illustrate the discrepancy and demonstrate the originality of the Kūfan pietist position.

The case for Zoroastrian influence on the Kūfan Muslim discourse against female mourning can easily be dismissed. The Zoroastrian code on funerary practices does not include specific injunctions against women's lamentations for the dead. Zoroastrians were simply unconcerned with this matter. Their predominant interest centered rather on questions of purity and pollution. In this regard, due to a concern with menstrual contamination, women were prohibited from acting as priests, who administered the last rites, or as undertakers and corpse bearers. Otherwise, however, women were entitled to participate in funerary as well as other rituals. Thus, in regard to mourning rites and the question of women, there is no reason to suspect that Iraqi Muslim pietists assimilated Zoroastrian notions.[107]

An examination of Christian and Jewish attitudes toward female mourners will serve further to prove the point about the originality of the Kūfan Muslim approach to lamenting women. Like the Ḥadīth, the Babylonian Talmud contains injunctions to dissuade women from lamenting for the dead in a violent fashion. But the similarity ends there. Even the poorest Jewish husband, according to the Mishna, has the obligation to provide two flutes and a lamenting woman for his deceased wife. The Babylonian Talmud actually refers to "Ishmaelite"—that is, Arab—lament in positive terms, as a rite worthy of imitation. Professional lament seemed problematic for the rabbis only when it conflicted with the semihallowed intermediate days of Passover and Tabernacles—a mild restriction suspended in the case of scholars, who were worthy of lament at all times of the year.[108] Evidently, Muslims, who sought to diverge from the Jews in certain funeral practices, were in no way influenced by this Jewish appreciation for expressions of mourning.[109]

By contrast, Christian clerical and Muslim pietist sensibilities resembled each other in several respects. Origen of Alexandria (d. 254), Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258), and other influential Christians had attacked the *planctus* and *nenia* as un-Christian laments, and they had castigated women for indulging in pagan practices.[110] Convened in Mesopotamia, the Nestorian Synod of 576 similarly ruled against the percussive sounds of instruments of lament.[111] Such legislation remained in place in early Islamic times. Thus, in Antioch, several patriarchs of the Syriac Orthodox Church—including Quryaqos of Takrit (793–817), John III (846–873), and Ignatius II (878–883)—tried to impose a divide between clergy and the "women who advance to the tombs with cymbals, rattles, and dancing leaps." Clergy were discouraged from entering a house of violent lament for a month after the event had occurred, and female mourners were to be "kept away from the church."[112] From a certain perspective, then, the Muslim discourse may appear simply as a continuation of the late antique Christian discourse or a calque of later Christian discussions.[113]

Still, there was a sharp sense of discontinuity in that Christian authorities, unlike Muslim ones, encouraged chanting by women at funerals, while rejecting wailing. The shift in emphasis may readily be appreciated by comparing Christian and Muslim versions of 'Umar's approach to Christian mourners. Muslim versions of the so-called Pact of ʿUmar, likely forged, granted Christians social and political protection so long as they agreed, among other things, not to raise their voices during funeral processions.[114] By contrast, according to the Syriac *Life* of Gabriel of Qarṭmīn (d. 648)—itself somewhat legendary—'Umar allowed the Christians to use the wooden gong and chant psalms while marching with the bier.[115] In his commemoration of Paula, who died in Bethlehem in 404, Jerome (d. 420) gratefully recalled the absence of wailing at the blessed woman's funeral, yet he celebrated the fact that a large crowd of men and women attended the event. Even the virgins, normally in cloistered seclusion, joined the funeral, as it would have been a "sacrilege" for them to withhold their respects from such a saintly woman.[116] The Nestorian Synod of 676, convoked by George I on the island of Diren in East Arabia, serves to clarify the Eastern Christian position. Canon 18 deplored violent and disorderly laments by irrational women, but Canon 9 encouraged the accompaniment of the funeral procession by religious women reciting psalms and singing hymns in commemoration of the deceased.[117] Christian bishops did not endeavor to ban women from participating in funerals and even appreciated their chanting of psalms as a labor of religion.[118]

"It was on such occasions," a historian of late antiquity has argued in reference to the cult of the saints, "that the greatest cleavage of all in late-antique urban society was bridged: for a delightful and perilous moment, the compartments segregating the sexes in public broke down."[119] Slowly yet surely, as the early Islamic process of socialization unfolded, such moments occurred less frequently. Evidently, the Kūfan Muslim discourse did not simply assimilate Zoroastrian, Jewish, or Christian values. It rather betrays a deep, new anxiety about women congregating and mingling with men. It targets not merely the ritual of wailing but the very presence of women at funerals. Underlying this reaction was pietists' conviction that women would not always behave in public as Abū Ṭalḥa's wife did in private, with affected or genuine composure. They feared that wailing women, with their violent and spontaneous laments, would upstage the poised and contemplative Muslim men who had already submitted to God's judgment and now yearned to enact an orderly and predictable funerary rite.

CHAPTER FIVE

Urban Processions and Communal Prayers
Opportunities for Social, Economic, and Religious Distinction

Muḥammad died on the bed of his beloved wife ʿĀ'isha and immediately, according to Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), a controversy emerged. The Muslims who had argued earlier about the right way to wash the Prophet's corpse now began "disputing with one another over the place of his burial." Some favored burying Muḥammad in his mosque, perhaps under the pulpit. Others preferred to transport him toward the cemetery of al-Baqīʿ, where Muḥammad's companions had been interred. All of a sudden, Abū Bakr (d. 634), soon to become the first caliph, recalled that the apostle used to say, "All prophets are buried precisely where they die." As a result, "the bed on which God's Messenger died was lifted, and a grave was dug for him beneath it." Such an austere burial would signify in a positive way that Muḥammad had not been interred "in his mosque.… May God slay a people who adopt the graves of their prophets as mosques." In its rejection of urban pomp, it also evoked the stark origins of Islam.[1]

ʿĀ'isha died two generations after Muḥammad, during the month of Ramaḍān in the year 678. Her last rites were conducted with all the pomp and circumstance one might expect in the funeral of a member of the Muslim elite following the success of the Arab conquests. It was a night burial. Pieces of cloth, wrapped around palm leaves, drenched in olive oil, and set aflame, accompanied the procession toward the cemetery of al-Baqīʿ. People gathered from the villages around Medina. Helpers, the Medinese who claimed the distinction of having provided refuge to Muḥammad after the Hijra, also attended. The cemetery became crowded with women, as during a major festival. Abū Hurayra, a prolific traditionist, led the prayer over ʿĀ'isha's bier;

and ‘Abdallah ibn ‘Umar, a highly admired traditionist present at the funeral, “did not condemn it” (*lā yunkiruhu*). It is somewhat of a mystery what Ibn ‘Umar might have found objectionable here.[2] To understand the issue, we shall need to delve into the politics of the funerary prayer. But the prayer was not the only part of the ceremony that a Muslim pietist might have criticized. In more than one way, the procession in ‘Ā’isha’s honor represented the antithesis of the emerging Islamic ideal.

Iraqi men of religion would have decried the participation of women in this event. In general, Muslims considered it a meritorious act to follow processions toward the cemetery. Jurists represented this deed as one of five essential duties that Muslims owed one another, and they argued that God would reward participants by forgiving their sins. Men following biers would gain not only immaterial rewards of value in the scheme of salvation, but also tangible benefits, such as an increase in moral standing and social prestige. These benefits were beyond the reach of women, however, since pietists condemned their participation in funeral processions.[3] An oral tradition transmitted by the Iraqi pietist Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 777/778) represents the prophet Muḥammad challenging the stubborn women who endeavored to walk alongside the men toward the grave. “Are you among the pallbearers?” asked Muḥammad. “No,” replied the women. (Carrying the bier on one’s shoulder was men’s work.) “Will you be strewing dust [on the grave]?” “No,” said the women. “Then return having burdened yourselves with sin,” replied Muḥammad, “but without having earned a reward [for performing a good deed]” (*fa-`rji‘na ma’zūrāt ghayr ma’jūrāt*).[4] Thus this ritual was a labor of religion reserved for men. (See fig. 5.1.)

The pietists who pondered the making of an Islamic society worried about other social issues as well. Funeral processions drew mixed crowds of men and women, rich and poor, Muslims and non-Muslims. The piercing cries of wailers, the smell of incense and camphor, and the colorful silks the wealthy wore as they paraded by the mosque or through the market commanded the attention of strangers and bystanders. Economic distinctions became manifest in these funerals, with Muslims flaunting signs of newfound wealth and urbane sophistication. This worldly show disturbed ideologues. Focusing their attacks on symbols of high economic status and decrying the gap between privileged and impoverished funerals, they preached in favor of austerity.

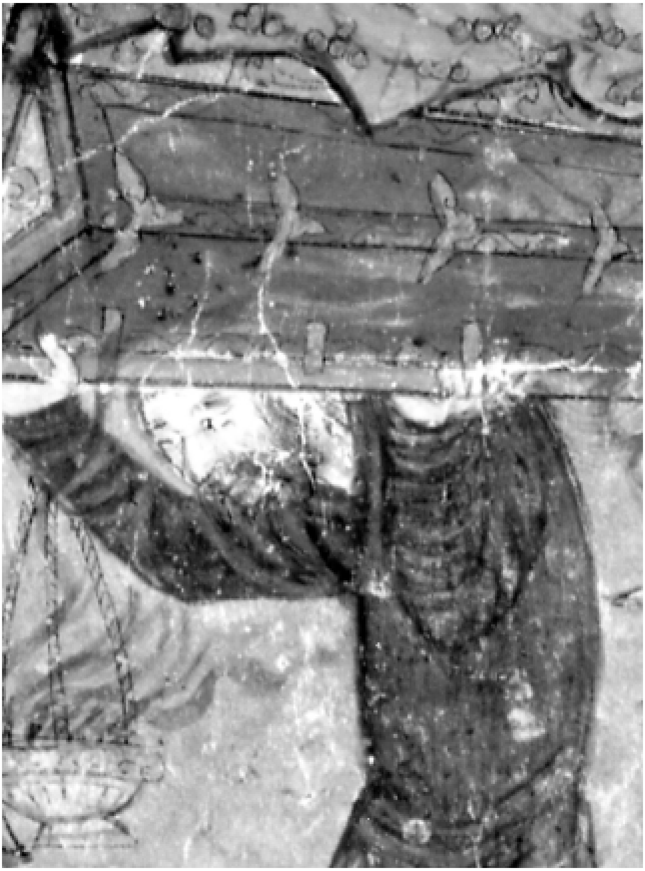

Figure 5.1 A man bearing a bier. Here we see a detail of an Ilkhanid illustration (not fully shown) of a funeral procession from the "Great Mongol" *Shah-nama (Book of Kings*). A company of men, a camel, and an elephant accompany the biers of Rustam and Zavara on the way to the grave. Women are notably absent from the event. The illustration, conducted at Tabriz during the first half of the fourteenth century, represents a fusion of Persian and Mongol ideals. The image shown here draws our attention to the central figure, carrying a burning fire. His sorrowful eyes absentmindedly focus on the path ahead, as he walks burdened meritoriously by the weight of a dead body. Source: Helen and Alice Colburn Fund and Seth K. Sweetser Fund, 22.393. Photo by courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Reproduced with permission. © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved.

Because urban processions were public events, pietists perceived them as opportunities for the promotion of an Islamic social order. Their ultimate goal was to create a sense of community among Muslim men. To realize this goal, they sought to exclude women from processions and to eliminate signs of affluence, so that all Muslim men might appear equally humble. But class, despite this egalitarian tendency, was not an essential category of social differentiation for pietists. The key categories that determined their personal identity were sex and religion. In their sectarian milieu, the problem with Muslim funerals was that they resembled non-Muslim funerals far too much. Yet funerary style, they realized, could serve to define their religious community and to mark it off from other communities, thus providing the band of Muslim brothers with a distinctive social identity. As they sought to imagine the boundaries and composition of this community, they reflected also about incorporating and excluding imperfect Muslims. By questioning the qualifications of such Muslims to receive the benefit of a collective prayer for the dead, they signaled the requirements for membership in their society.

The Urban Context: Cemeteries

Though they sometimes buried their dead at home, as in the case of Muḥammad, Muslims often transported the deceased to cemeteries upon *janāʾiz,* or biers. This term, which served to name the books on funerary practice so often cited in these pages, came to designate funeral processions as well. As burial in cemeteries became the standard practice, these processions became an integral part of everyday life in the city. Notwithstanding Muḥammad's example, the jurist al-Shāfiʿī recommended burial in cemeteries, especially if an ancient report (*khabar*) existed about them, due to the sacredness or inviolability of this ground (*li-ḥurmat al-maqābir*). "If someone dies in Mecca or Medina," he remarked, "I would prefer for him to be buried in their cemeteries." There was a disadvantage, in al-Shāfiʿī's view, to digging an individual, isolated grave in an odd space. Such a grave might be accidentally urinated upon or exhumed, an unlikely outcome in the case of a grave that formed part of a group in an area designated specifically for burial.[5]

Despite al-Shāfiʿī's recommendation, many oral traditions refer to *qubūr,* a cluster of graves that may have lacked the status of a cemetery as a distinct space. In the Oral Tradition, the term *maqbara,* which properly designates a cemetery, occurs infrequently in comparison to the term *qubūr;* the term *jabbāna,* which refers to a level burial ground, seldom appears.[6] This reliance on the term *qubūr* to indicate the place of burial suggests that in the earliest period of their history, Muslims did not always grant this area a unique topographical identity. Whether located within the city or in its outskirts, this kind of burial site probably grew organically as more human beings died. It did not mark the landscape with fixed boundaries.

Funeral processions had different destinations in different cities, depending on the location of cemeteries. In Muḥammad’s time, a number of burial grounds existed in and around the cluster of settlements that would become known as Medina. The most famous, al-Baqīʿ, was situated in what would become the heart of the town, by the torrent Mahzūr. Also used as a graveyard by clans of Jews and Bedouins was the Jabbāna, a level area northwest of the city. This place did not function exclusively as a cemetery. It was at least partially inhabited, and Bedouins sometimes camped in it. The burial plots that the Banū Sāʿida tribe had in the Jabbāna served also as a marketplace.[7] Funeral processions in this environment commanded the attention of townspeople buying and selling their wares.

Medina was not alone in the Muslim world in including a cemetery within or near the inhabited area. Divided into tribal districts, Kūfa had in the center of each district a burial ground (*jabbāna*)—an open, uninhabited space that served citizens as a communal gathering site.[8] It is unclear whether this layout was deliberate or accidental. The garrison of Kūfa grew quickly and somewhat haphazardly into a midsized city. Its cemeteries, even if located initially outside of inhabited quarters, might easily have been engulfed by the spread of the urban area.[9] At any rate, the garrison eventually became a city with multiple, internal cemeteries. As a result, a typical Kūfan procession might well have snaked its way from the home of the deceased to the local cemetery without ever leaving the tribal quarter.

In the garrison of Baṣra, many of the cemeteries also served tribal groups. The Banū Yashkur and the Banū Shaybān tribes each had its own cemetery. But these two cemeteries sat on the outskirts of Old Baṣra, it seems, rather than within tribal districts.[10] In the garrison city of Fusṭāṭ, the Arab conquerors buried the dead in cemeteries outside of the urban region. All of this variation in the location of cemeteries in the cities established by the Arab conquerors has led an archaeologist to conclude tentatively that “the Arabs in the early period were on the whole not very particular about where they buried their dead.”[11] A specific pattern governing the location of burial grounds did not exist in early Islamic times. In light of this multiplicity of forms, Muslim jurists advanced no uniform rule on the location of cemeteries. The multifarious arrangements manifested in practice did not appear to them un-Islamic.

In large cities with external cemeteries, conveyance of the bier to the burial spot consumed much time and effort. This was the case in Damascus, for example, one of the cities conquered by the Arabs. In pre-Islamic times, the Romans there had buried their dead outside of Bāb al-Farādīs, one of the city’s gates. Continuing this pattern, the Umayyads built two cemeteries outside the gates of Bāb Tūmā and

Bāb al-Ṣaghīr.[12] Baghdad, the city founded by the ʻAbbasids in the late eighth century, resembled late Roman Damascus rather more than early Islamic Kūfa in its placement of cemeteries. Its graveyards lay around the main gates *ad sanctos,* near the Tigris River, and by the highways.[13] In these populous cities with remote cemeteries, the distance to the grave could seem eternal. Pallbearers experienced hardship in performing their task. Though they considered it meritorious to carry the bier on their shoulders, they sometimes hired donkeys for the privilege.[14]

On the way to the cemetery, the men following the bier would pass by strangers who would feel little inclination to join the procession, despite their knowledge that doing so would seem virtuous. The author al-Tanūkhī (d. 994) best expressed this sentiment in a humorous story entitled "He Swore on Pain of Divorce Never to Escort the Dead." The story concerns a man conned into transporting a stranger's corpse for burial. When the dead man turns out to be a decapitated slave boy killed in a crime of passion, the police of Baghdad hold the charitable stranger responsible. Eventually, a detective discovers the bier belonged to a certain mosque, which leads to the capture of the true criminals. The man who had dutifully transported a stranger's bier to the cemetery vows not to do so in the future.[15] In large cities, where deaths were frequent and cemeteries distant, men rarely joined processions unless the deceased was famous and the event extravagant.

Against Pomp in Processions

An extravagant procession might feature burning palm leaves, lamps, candles, incense burners, or torches of fire. But pietists opposed the use of fiery attractions in Muslim funerals. If we are to believe biographers, many a dying Muslim made a deathbed proclamation against artificial light in funerals. Supposedly even ʻĀ'isha, whose procession was so wonderfully illuminated, and the man who prayed for her corpse that night, Abū Hurayra, rejected the practice of following biers with fire. Pietists regarded such a display as all too worldly.[16]

Candles and torches were characteristic of Roman and imperial Christian funerary pomp. Romans used them in broad daylight, for show. Night burials were rare in the Roman Empire, except in the case of paupers, whose families lacked the means to bury the dead with a display of wealth and therefore preferred the cover of darkness.[17] Muslims also buried paupers at night, at least on occasion. An oral tradition reports that pallbearers rushed to inhume a poor woman (*miskīna*) at night, a black lady who used to sweep the mosque.[18] Missing her, Muḥammad wished to know her whereabouts. His companions, it turned out, had conducted her burial without waking him up, despite his express wishes. Although they "trivialized her affair" (*ṣaghgharū amrahā*), he insisted on praying at her grave. Once there he exclaimed: "These graves have enveloped their people with darkness. May God bring light to them by my prayer on their behalf."[19] But Muslims, unlike Romans, found nothing shameful in nighttime funerals. They buried the dead, rich or poor, as quickly as possible. Jurists considered any time of day or night appropriate, with the exception of sunrise, noon, and sunset. On these occasions, because the devil's presence was bold or the heat of the sun overwhelming, they discouraged prayer in general. They also considered funeral prayers that would conflict with prescribed times of prayer, in the morning or afternoon, problematic to some degree.[20]

In the first few centuries of the Common Era, Christians had opposed the use of artificial light in funerals. They associated the custom with cremation and a pagan cult of the dead. With the Christianization of the Roman Empire, however, they adopted the use of candles in funerals, turning them into a symbol of the light of Christ in the world. Candles became an extra expense added to an already costly affair. Justinian (r. 527–565), who declared himself emperor of both the living and the dead, helped the Church finance burials, as did other Byzantine Emperors. In Constantinople, the transportation of biers *extra muros* was particularly troublesome given the city's size. There, as in Egypt and Syria, civic confraternities of Christians increasingly assumed the costs and responsibilities of burial, which often included an extravagant show of light. At least some of these ceremonies continued after the Arab conquests, in lands under Islamic control.[21]

Muslims responded to this Christian practice at multiple levels. In the first place, they pressured Christians to tone down public displays of their religion. A late medieval version of the so-called Pact of 'Umar with the Christians of Syria included, among other clauses, a specification against the use of lights in religious processions—in honor of the dead, for example—passing through Muslim roads and crossing Muslim markets.[22] At the same time, Muslim notables surely felt tempted to compete with Christians in funerary extravagance. If they saw the Islamic Empire as a culmination of Byzantine ambitions, they may even have advocated triumphal celebrations sponsored by the government and commemorating the new marriage of religion and state.[23] According to this logic, one would expect Muslim funerals to outperform Christian ones in the fireworks. 'Ā'isha's fiery procession, if it should be regarded in this context, would appear as a step in the right direction, toward the realization of an Arabo-Muslim imperial standard. Yet there is but indirect evidence for such a view of the matter.

In fact, annalists chose to tell us precious few stories about candlelight funerals bearing any resemblance to Christian ideals. Their commemoration of pomp in ʻĀʼisha's funeral is rather exceptional. Rarely did they celebrate luxurious processions signaling power and an elevated political or economic status. One readily finds countless death notices in their works, but not descriptions of rich parades in honor of caliphs, their mothers, or wives. When caliphal funerals are described, the mood is decidedly minimalist. All we hear in the historian al-Ṭabarī's account about the funeral procession of the ʻAbbasid caliph al-Maʼmūn (r. 813–833) are the instructions for his son to convey him hastily to the pit, followed by genuine worry about God's coming judgment. Having served as caliph, the sense of responsibility seemed unbearable near death, and al-Maʼmūn wished he had never been created. He expressed these last regrets while on jihad against Byzantium, as he lay dying from the consumption of fresh green dates.[24]

Annalists happily commemorated how dying Muslims decreed that no candles be used in their funerals. Thus they remarked that Asmāʼ bint Abī Bakr, the daughter of the first caliph, willed before her death in 692: "Do not follow me with fire."[25] Similarly, ʻAbdallāh ibn Mughaffal, a teacher of law in Baṣra who died near the end of Muʻāwiya's caliphate (r. 661–680), allegedly instructed his family not to follow his bier with fire.[26] And so too for Saʻīd ibn al-Musayyab, a Medinese jurist famous for suffering imprisonment on account of his refusal to swear allegiance to the sons of caliph ʻAbd al-Malik. He died in the "Year of the Jurists" (94 of the Hijra or 712–713 CE), a year so named because many experts in Islamic law perished during its course. At any rate, before expiring he decreed that neither a poet conducting rhymes in the *rajaz* meter nor a red plush, and neither candles nor incense burners, should accompany his last journey on earth.[27]

Muslim preferences, if considered from a Christian perspective, may appear as a rejection and inversion of Christian form, especially in light of the clause against pompous processions in the Pact of ʻUmar. Yet it is not altogether clear that this is the right perspective. The Islamic spurning of candles did not necessarily emerge as a polemical response to a Christian custom or as a minimalist reaction to Byzantine excess. Perhaps its source was quite simply an austere religious sentiment eschewing worldly pomp in the funerals of notables, Christian or Muslim. Indeed, the very fact that annalists repeatedly celebrated decrees against the use of candles at funerals suggests that Muslims of means had not all forsaken the imperial

Christian custom.

As they marched toward the cemetery, pietists promoted an economically egalitarian agenda. They censured not only candles but also other worldly trappings. With horseback riding seen as a mark of distinction, they opposed riding to the cemetery in front of the procession.[28] Riding back after disposal of the dead seemed, by contrast, acceptable. In a story meant to highlight the piety of a caliph, Ibn Sa‘d (d. 845) recounts how, following caliph Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik’s funeral in 717, his pious successor caliph ‘Umar II (d. 720) refused to ride to the palace on the mounts of the deceased caliph. He instead rode back to his old house on his own donkey.[29] Pietists not only insisted on walking to the burial grounds; they also pressured participants to remove their sandals at the entrance to the cemetery, if not beforehand.[30] The purpose of this gesture was to submit, in honor of the dead, to the “attire of the humble” (*ziyy ahl al-tawāḍu‘*). Anyone insisting on wearing sandals, as had Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, was expected to produce a good excuse (*‘udhr*) by mentioning, for instance, a fear of thorns or impurities.[31] Barefoot or not, pietists did not commit themselves equally to gestures of austerity. The traditionist Anas ibn Malik (d. ca. 711) rode to a funeral on a large horse with all sorts of contraptions to protect his head and eyes from the sun, signaling to everyone in attendance that he was a Persian-like grandee (*dihqān*). A wealthy traditionist, he considered himself perfectly entitled to ride to the cemetery, as if to signal his economic distinction. His biographer tells us the man used to saunter in worldly clothes even though he preached against their use.[32] Signs of opulence and urbanity were tolerated, if not admired, in the affluent yet religious.

If they chose not to ride horses but still wished to display a high social or political status during a funeral procession, Muslims could walk in front of the bier. The first three caliphs had marched this way, Sunni authorities recalled. Defending this fashion as more distinguished (*afḍal*), they claimed that only the fourth caliph, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661), had walked behind the bier. His action, they argued, violated traditional custom, the *sunna.*[33] This reference to a discrepancy in ritual forms, pitting the first three caliphs against the fourth, suggests a Sunni-Shī‘ite divide, for Shī‘ites supported ‘Alī but regarded the first three caliphs as usurpers. Furthermore, Shi’ite authorities—Zaydi, Ismā‘īli, and Twelver—recommended walking behind the bier.[34] It is not necessary to trace their joint preference to the supposed example of their revered leader. Their impulse to invert the Sunni custom may have had deeper roots. At some point in the process of developing a sense of communal self-consciousness, they adopted a number of small gestures by which to differentiate themselves from Sunnis. In this case, because marching in front was perceived as a symbol of Sunni political power (hence its association with the first three caliphs), a politically disempowered faction found it meaningful to signal positively its retreat from a position of forward leadership. But whatever its origins, this gesture spread, gripping the imagination of Ḥanafites, who sought to walk humbly, like Shīʿites, behind the bier.[35]

Ethiopian Biers for Notable Women

Notables liked to decorate their biers, the platforms they used to transport the deceased to the cemetery, with fancy cloth. These vehicles, at the center of the funerary show, varied in style. Decorations served to distinguish the funeral processions of wealthy from impoverished women. If they could afford it, Muslims would wrap the bed or undercarriage on which they laid the corpse with silk or a red plush fabric.[36] They could also attach red, green, or yellow veils to the bier, smeared with embalming oils. These accoutrements irritated some spectators. The Fāṭimid judge al-Nuʿmān (d. 974) saw them as superfluous objects accessible only to the rich. He reminded men and women seduced by ornamented biers that God's Messenger had once said: "Graves are foremost in the equitability of the hereafter. Within them a man of noble birth is indistinguishable from a plebeian."[37]

The best of biers was an exclusive vehicle associated with Muḥammad. Extraordinarily, a number of Medina's famous women, including Muḥammad's wife Zaynab bint Jaḥsh (d. 641), alongside a few distinguished men, such as caliph Abū Bakr, used Muḥammad's bed as a hearse. In his capacity as governor of Medina in the 660s or 670s, Marwan began to restrict its use, allowing only dead men of noble birth (*al-rajul al-sharīf*) to ride on the blessed deathbed.[38] Notables could dress this sacred relic or, if unavailable, a profane model, in an exotic Ethiopian style.

Exchanges between Arabia and East Africa in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period occurred frequently, given the close geographical proximity of the Yemen to Ethiopia. Tradition holds that persecuted Muslims found refuge at the court of Aksum around 615, and it refers with fondness to the Negus of Ethiopia. Words deriving from Geʿez, the Old Ethiopic language, appear in the Qurʾān, and Abyssinian inscriptions have been discovered in Arabia.[39] Medina's Ethiopian biers formed part of this flow of goods and ideas from Africa to Arabia.

What characterized the Ethiopian import (designated by the term *naʿsh*) was the cloth wrapped around the bedstead (*sarir*). This turned a simple bier into a fanciful, cloth-covered carriage that served to transport deceased women to the cemetery.[40] According to biographers, Asmā’ bint ‘Umays, one of the Muslim women who visited Ethiopia, brought into Islamdom this most desirable innovation. With the permission of caliph ‘Umar I, she put the novel technology into effect in honor of Muḥammad’s wife Zaynab bint Jaḥsh (d. 641). Alternatively, according to a conflicting version, she first introduced the vehicle in the funeral of Muḥammad’s daughter Fāṭima (d. 632).[41] The fresh palm boughs that Asmā’ had ordered for another one of Muḥammad’s deceased daughters, Umm Kulthūm (d. 630), might have followed the native model.[42] But it is difficult to tell. Perhaps this last pall was simply every poor woman’s alternative to the Ethiopian bier.

Eventually the Ethiopian technique spread from western Arabia to another corner of the Islamic world. Cloth-covered biers for women reached Baṣra, one of the garrison cities of Mesopotamia. This conclusion can be inferred from an oral tradition, recorded by Abū Dā’ūd (d. 889), that explains why the Baṣran Anas ibn Malik (d. ca. 711) chose to stand directly in front of a deceased woman’s posteriors when leading the funerary prayer. Apparently, since in the olden days “there were no cloth-covered biers” (*lam takun al-nu‘ūsh*), prayer leaders used to stand in this position so as to hide women’s midmost from the people. The tradition remained in place, even as Ethiopian biers began to serve as cover for women of privilege. In the short version of the tradition by al-Tirmidhī (d. 892), the deceased woman is identified as belonging to the Quraysh, the elite tribe of Mecca.[43]

The principal function of such biers was to conceal the body of a dead woman (already wrapped in shrouds) from public view. The prospect of being displayed in an emaciated state was embarrassing to women, who wished for protection from tribesmen’s eyes. Thus, according to her male biographer, a preoccupied Fāṭima pleaded with Asmā’: “How shall I be borne exposed [*makshūfa*] on the necks of men? Already I have become bones covered only by skin. And how will the men gaze upon my cadaver [*juththatī*] when I am carried on the bedstead?”[44] On this occasion and for this reason, according to this source, a sympathetic Asmā’ proposed and adopted the Ethiopian technique. A second related reason emerges from the story on the introduction of the Ethiopian bier in Zaynab’s funeral. “The men and the women used to go out [with the dead] equally” (*al-rijāl wa `l-nisā’ kānū yakhrujūn bihim sawā’an*), recalled Ḥammād ibn Zayd (d. 795), a Baṣran traditionist who relied on the authority of another Baṣran, Ayyūb (d. 748). But when Zaynab died, caliph ‘Umar commanded a herald to announce, “No one will go out for Zaynab bint Jaḥsh other than her matrilineal kinsmen” (*dhū raḥim min ahlihā*). Perturbed by the measure, Asmā’ proposed to the caliph the cloth-covered carriage. When the caliph examined it, he exclaimed, “How much better this is! And how it veils!” Consequently he ordered the herald to announce instead, “Go out for your mother’s funeral.”[45] As Muḥammad’s wife, Zaynab was considered a mother to all Muslim believers.

Ethiopian biers not only violated egalitarian ideals; they also marked a divergence from the customs of Muḥammad’s day, for according to Muslim tradition, they were first used in Medina after the Prophet’s death. Why, given that covered biers could easily serve to distinguish wealthy from poor funerals and given that they were regarded as a non-Arabian product introduced after Muḥammad’s death, did traditionists not condemn them as an execrable innovation? The answer is not entirely clear. Evidently, however, they willingly approved of any device to veil women, dead or alive. Their interest in segregating the sexes and protecting women’s modesty overrode their other concern to advocate for a funerary form sanctioned by prophetic decree and accessible to all, rich or poor. In eighth-century Baṣra, where pietists reflected on the advantages of Ethiopian biers, they voiced only support for the ingenious device to veil respectable women from the crowd of men.

Muslim Participation in Jews’ or Christians’ Funerals

Through their remarks against burning candles in notable processions and in favor of biers to conceal women’s bodies, pietists revealed their interest in defining their own place in a complex society that did not operate fully according to their ideals. How should Muslims participate in everyday civic events that failed to meet their standards? This was a key question underlying their discourse on funeral processions. An issue they came to address, as they tried to establish their social identity, was Muslim participation in funerals honoring Jews or Christians. This was an issue of high social relevance in the formative period of Islam because Muslims then were outnumbered by non-Muslims almost everywhere outside of the Arabian peninsula. In cities where the majority of the population was still of non-Muslim persuasion, Muslims lived in mixed neighborhoods—in close proximity to friends and parents who, despite the allure of Islam, commonly remained attached to Judaism or Christianity until death.

Pietists felt ambivalent about accompanying deceased Jews or Christians on the journey to the grave.[46] Although they deemed it meritorious to lead the biers of friends and strangers toward the cemetery, they were unsure if this act counted as a good deed when performed for non-Muslims. The problem was that by attending a funeral procession, one honored the memory of the deceased, but in the case of Jews or Christians, such participation implied tacit acceptance of the choice to live and to die without converting to Islam.

A positive response by the community had consequences in the scheme of salvation. If, according to Muslim tradition, the people praised a dead individual during the funeral procession, they assured his admission into Paradise. If they disparaged him, Hell-Fire became his certain destination. Public opinion about the deceased had an effect on an individual’s fate because the Muslims acted as “God’s witnesses on earth” (*shuhadā’ Allāh fi `l-arḍ*).[47] It is in this context that we should understand Muslim reservations about participating in the funerals of non-Muslims. In light of the notion that social action had religious repercussions, some Muslims felt obliged to take seriously the responsibility to show approval or disapproval during public ceremonies honoring the dead. That said, joining the funeral processions of non-Muslims was not so controversial as certain other death rites involving non-Muslims. Washing corpses across the religious boundary was highly problematic, as we have seen, particularly in the case of non-Muslims handling Muslim corpses. Jurists found even more troubling, as we shall see, the prospect of Muslims praying for the welfare of Jews, Christians, or Zoroastrians who had died as adults, in the age of reason, having had the opportunity to convert to the right religion.

Perhaps the most telling opinions on the issue at hand were given by the jurist Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), in the form of responsa collected by al-Khallāl (d. 923) in his book *Aḥkām ahl al-milal.* The chapter on funerary practices in this book contains a subsection entitled “The man who follows [the bier of] his relative the infidel.” Here Ibn Ḥanbal is quoted in support of the right of Muslims to join funerary processions in honor of deceased infidels.[48] Yet his remarks reveal a conflict of thoughts. He commends the behavior of al-Ḥārith (ibn ‘Abdallāh) ibn Abī Rabī’a, the Zubayrid governor of Baṣra between 685 and 687, on the occasion of the death of his mother, an Abyssinian Christian. This Muslim prefect was present at his mother’s funeral but stood on the sidelines without participating fully in the event; her coreligionists took charge of the ceremony. In an oral tradition that Ibn Ḥanbal related, the prophet Muḥammad similarly advises a man who wishes to take part in the funeral procession of his deceased Christian mother. “Ride your donkey and move along in front,” he says, “for by riding in front of it you will not be with it.”[49] Ibn Ḥanbal addressed Muslim participation not only in the funerals of Christian parents but also of Christian neighbors. Thus when Isḥaq ibn Manṣūr (d. 865) inquired about a Muslim attending the funeral of the deceased Christian mother of a Muslim neighbor, Ibn Ḥanbal opined that the man could follow the procession but should stay on the sidelines.[50]

Such questions about coexistence stemmed from an environment in which Muslims lived in close quarters with Christians. The answers reflect an inclination to behave with one's neighbors Muslim or otherwise in a civil and urbane manner.[51] The same mood can easily be detected in an oral tradition about Muḥammad's attitude toward a procession in honor of a deceased Jew. According to the report, the Prophet once stood up while a Jewish procession passed by. Somebody in his company questioned his reasons for the action. "Is it not a human being?" he answered.[52] The implication was that all deceased persons, regardless of religion, deserved a gesture of respect.

The narrative in which this oral tradition was embedded suggests how, regardless of its origins or authenticity, a prophetic tradition would be applied outside of Arabia after Muḥammad's death. According to both Muslim and al-Bukhārī, Sahl ibn Ḥunayf (d. ca. 658) and Qays ibn Sa'd related the tradition when they were in the town of al-Qādisiyya. A funeral procession passed in front of them. They rose to honor it. Bystanders protested that the cortege belonged to "the natives" (*ahl al-arḍ*)—to non-Muslims. In their own defense, the two men cited Muḥammad's example. It is of course impossible to know whether or not Sahl ibn Ḥunayf and Qays Ibn Sa'd actually performed this deed, and if so, precisely when and where. (A number of different towns boasted the name of al-Qādisiyya; this one perhaps refers to a battle site between the lowlands of Iraq and the desert of Arabia.) Nevertheless, there is little doubt about the social context that made the story meaningful: this was a milieu where Muslims sometimes honored the non-Muslim dead and where they needed religious justification for such an action. As always, al-Bukhārī and Muslim related the story on the basis of various authorities. They claimed that 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Layla (d. ca. 702), a Kūfan, delivered the report to another Kūfan, 'Amr ibn Murra (d. 730). He passed it on to Shu'ba (ibn al-Ḥajjāj) the Baṣran (d. ca. 777), who finally transmitted it to Ādam (ibn Abī Iyās, d. ca. 821) and Muḥammad ibn Ja'far, also known as Ghundar (d. 808). This chain of transmission suggests that the tradition became socially relevant in eighth-century Kūfa and Baṣra.

Not all Muslims espoused such a civil or humanistic tone as this oral tradition conveyed. Pietists advanced diverging interpretations to explain the Prophet's words and actions. Some claimed Muḥammad had actually risen to his feet due to the feeling of dread (*faza'*) inspired by death.[53] Others believed he had moved not in deference to the Jews but to the angels accompanying the procession.[54] A few thought he had stood up because one should not allow Jews walking by to tower over a Muslim's head.[55] Muslims opposed to the gesture came to represent the very action of standing readily for processions as a Jewish rather than an Islamic cultural statement. "The first to rise for a procession are the Jews," explained an oral tradition. Once a rabbi (*ḥabr*) informed Muḥammad, who had risen for a procession, that the Jews do likewise, Muḥammad sat down and exclaimed, "Diverge from them" (*khālifūhum*).[56] An Ibāḍi Khārijite from Khurasān, Abū Ghānim (d. ca. 815), exclaimed that Muḥammad was accustomed to rising, but "then he sat and commanded sitting down in contrariety to the Jews" (*thumma qaʻada wa-amara bi `l-quʻūd mukhālafatan li `l-yahūd*). He proceeded to comment on the authority of the Kūfan Companion Abū Mūsā (al-Ash'arī, d. ca. 663) that the "uncivilized peoples before the coming of Islam used to rise for the funerary procession passing-by"[57] Virtually all jurists agreed that the custom of rising for biers indiscriminately had been abrogated (*mansūkh*).[58]

There was another way by which Muslims tried to differentiate their funerary form from that of non-Muslims. Muslim tradition generally advocated hastening toward the cemetery, by day or by night.[59] The jurist al-Shāfiʻī (d. 820) recommended quick burials in all cases except dubious deaths. One should hesitate to bury immediately only those struck by lightning or those apparently drowned, just in case they are still alive.[60] To rush toward burial seemed so pressing that Muslim ideologues, Sunnis in particular, disapproved even of a pious detour: the ritual of conveying the bier toward the mosque, where the train of attendants would stop to offer a prayer for the deceased before heading expressly toward the cemetery.[61] To encourage walking speedily, it was said that Muḥammad had declared, "Do not crawl as the Jews."[62] A minor Talmudic tractate on funerary practices, *Semaḥot,* reveals the Jews liked to tarry on the way to the cemetery, especially for dead parents. *Moʻed Ḳaṭan,* one of the tractates from the Babylonian Talmud, indicates that, with or without rabbinical approval, some Jews liked to stop en route, deposit the bier on the ground, and lament.[63] It seems that Christians also took their time burying the dead, as they walked solemnly singing psalms. A Syriac account of the life of Simon the Stylite claims that it took five days to transport the saint's corpse from his column to the great church of Antioch. All the while, the Christians celebrated the death with hymns and shining lamps.[64] Thus, Muslim haste was, at some level, an attempt at communal distinction.

At stake was more than the issue of how, or rather whether, to behave politely with non-Muslims. Muslim ideologues were fundamentally concerned with the development of a communal identity. They endeavored to enact a ritual form that would signal the divergence of their religious community from others. To accomplish this social and religious goal, they did not find it necessary to engage in polemical criticism against the Jewish manner of honoring the deceased. It sufficed for them to recommend a structural inversion of

Jewish form, a straightforward transformation from the position of standing up to the position of sitting down.[65] But presumably, once the principle became firmly established that Muslims did not necessarily need to rise for funeral processions, some Muslims found it convenient to remain seated even for fellow Muslims, whenever they felt indolent, disinclined, or otherwise preoccupied.[66] Such was life in the city. Why should anyone bother with the funerals of strangers?

The scenes from the ideal procession have brought to light broad social divisions between men and women, rich and poor, Muslims and Jews. Ideologues drew certain social distinctions deliberately and explicitly—in particular with reference to women and Jews. For other distinctions, they used a finer brush. Differences between rich and poor emerge from the canvas, but only once we recognize the symbolic code operating in the shadows. Candles triggered an association with pomp in the funerals of Christian and Muslim notables. It is as if the arbiters of an Islamic sense of community were eager to define themselves in sharp opposition to certain social groups, while blurring other boundaries. Their endeavor to imagine a social self rested as well on contrasts drawn between the ideal community and stray individuals. This contrast did not appear clearly in the depiction of funeral processions. Yet it was manifest in jurists' discussions on the advisability of dignifying imperfect Muslims with a communal prayer.

Communal Prayer for Imperfect Muslims

Before they decided to accompany a funeral procession all the way to the cemetery, Muslims needed to determine whether or not the deceased subject qualified for a prayer. Jurists wondered about the benefits of blessing a variety of characters: the stillborn fetus, the adulteress and her son, the highway robber, the Qadarite believer in the operation of free human will, the woman who had died at childbirth, the victim of plague or pleurisy, the man struck by lightning, the Muslim trapped alongside polytheists in the rubble of a building, the slave girl who had swallowed a lime-based depilatory agent, and the dismembered hand of a Muslim martyr, such as a bird might drop one day from the sky, as in fact happened in Mecca during the Battle of the Camel.[67]

This Borgesian list calls for a finer taxonomy to unravel the logic of the system. A number of cases arose as jurists applied a legalistic frame of mind to oddities that defied simple categorization. To this category belong the martyrs who died in the city and the landlubber Muslims who died at sea. By convention, one would not administer the normal ritual to martyrs who died in holy war. In general, Islamic funerary law was designed for an urban environment. The administration of normative rituals required time and resources not readily available in wartime. Due to the practical exigencies of battle, martyrs' corpses could rarely be treated with deliberate care, even after the victory of Islam. Typically they would be granted burial on site, without much ceremony. Muslim tradition holds that Muḥammad himself "did not pray" for the martyrs of Uḥud.[68] His example set a clear precedent. Hence the question arose, in jurists' minds, whether or not to apply the exclusion from prayer to all martyrs: not only to the martyrs of the battlefield, but also to those elevated to the status of martyr due to a violent and unexpected way of death within a Muslim city. These martyrs of the city included women who died giving birth, men who drowned or burned to death, and victims of plague and pleurisy.[69] As for Muslims who died at sea, they belonged, like the martyrs of the battlefield, to a group that defied urban standards. The funerary prayer formed part of a complex of rituals. Ideally, in the ritual cycle, it would follow the preparation of the corpse for burial yet come before the interment. However, for the men and women who died at sea, the absence of earth precluded inhumation. Prayer without burial seemed especially inappropriate if the deceased was naked and clothes for shrouding were unavailable on board.[70]

The underlying principle behind many of the questions was simple: a last prayer should not be distributed freely. Only Muslims deserved it. But some Muslims, either due to the circumstances of their death or to moral failings, were potentially unworthy. Enemies of one's own sect were, of course, undeserving. Thus, Shīʿites excluded despisers of the man they would have chosen as first caliph, ʻAli. Sunnis might turn their backs on Qadarites, Khārijites, Murji'ites, and other exponents of heretical ideas.[71] To pray for such men and women would be irresponsible. The Muslims who saw themselves as "God's witnesses on earth" knew, as we have seen, that by praising or disparaging the deceased they would affect his or her final destination. For intercession (*shafāʻa*) on behalf of the dead to succeed, all that was needed was a prayer from a crowd (*umma*) of one hundred Muslims—even of only forty, so long as all of them were perfect monotheists.[72] Invested with such power, it behooved the community of Muslims to act responsibly so as not to tamper with God's plan prescribing a predestined end for each and every individual. An unspoken contract was apparently established: Muslims would ask for God's mercy only if they truly believed the dead person deserved it. They would administer prayer judiciously, reserving the right to withhold it from a certain kind of person. Thus they would divide the good from the bad.

Easier said than done. In certain cases it was difficult, if not impossible, for the community of Muslims to determine whether or not the deceased belonged to one or another camp. Consider, for instance, the case of the Muslim hypocrite. Prayers offered for this character were particularly contentious. When, at the funeral of the hypocrite ‘Abdallāh ibn Ubayy, Muḥammad stood up to offer a prayer, the self-righteous ‘Umar protested with boldness bordering on insolence (*jur’a*), surprising even himself. Startled, the Prophet defended himself, declaring he would intercede for the hypocrite seventy times if only he knew this act would lead to divine forgiveness. A short while later, however, a revelation dawned on the Prophet rendering it morally problematic to pray for depraved sinners (Qur’ān 9:84).[73]

Like hypocrites, Muslims in potentiality fit uneasily in the dualistic framework. To this category belong impressionable apostates who died before attaining maturity, Christian slave boys eager for conversion, runaways of uncertain religion, foundlings likely abandoned by Jews or Christians, and dead strangers found, after some examination, to have been circumcised.[74] Similarly, the children of Jews, Christians, and Magians presented a knotty problem if they died too young to exercise reason in choosing the right path. Good Muslims wished to intercede for them with God, but on what basis? The Prophet explained that although the parents may endeavor to convert the child to their error, every child is born according to the *fiṭra,* a natural disposition toward Islam. “Since God created them,” Muḥammad affirmed, “he knows better what they would have done” had they lived longer.[75] For all infants who cried before death, especially if their father was a Muslim, funeral prayers must be offered.[76] (Stillborn products of a non-Muslim father were discounted, the unfortunate result of miscegenation with a Muslim mother.) In general, jurists would deny prayer to miscarried fetuses regardless of Muslim parentage unless they were aborted after receipt of a human form, at the age of four months of gestation or thereabouts.[77]

Sane non-Muslim adults were, in this scheme, unproblematic. There was no good reason for the Muslim community to pray for their salvation. Nevertheless, they did present one curious case. If Muslim and non-Muslim corpses had mixed in the rubble of a building, so that one could not separate the one from the other, should prayer be delivered indiscriminately? The danger here was an accidental overflow of mercy to those who really did not deserve it. What a dilemma! One clever jurist (Abū Ḥanīfa) sought to resolve it in a statistical manner: pray if Muslims are in the majority. Others argued that no matter how few the Muslims, one should just pray with directed intention, whatever the risk of benefit to infidels.[78]

Adulterous women, like hypocrites, sometimes made it to the grave without getting caught. It is unlikely that the risk of being denied a last prayer dissuaded many women from the pursuit of illicit sex—the prospect of getting stoned by the community probably worked better as a deterrent. In case an adulteress was apprehended and died as a result of this punishment, jurists wondered whether or not to pray for her bruised remains.[79] Similarly, they were not sure whether it was right to administer a full burial for a person sentenced to a divinely ordained legal punishment (*ḥadd*) if the result turned out fatal. In these cases, they generally recommended prayer—and particularly so for the benefit of a crucified man whose eyes focused, at the end, in the direction of the Kaʿba in Mecca. The family of the deceased was entitled to participate in a funerary prayer in honor of a relative. Yet it seemed inappropriate for the Imam who had sentenced the deceased to lead the ceremony.[80] This restriction stemmed partly from a desire to preserve the dignity of the Imam's office: criminals sentenced to fatal punishments formed part of the Muslim community and deserved a prayer from their families but not a blessing from the community's leader and exemplar. The restriction also stemmed from a need to uphold the justice system. If the Imam presided over the funeral of the person he had sentenced, he would discredit his own judgment.

Muslims preferred to pray for the whole body. But their annals are full of stories about decapitated heads, in particular those of Shīʿite rebels and other political dissidents. Al-Ḥusayn's head was "the first hoisted on a post," on the 10th day of Muḥarram of the year 680. Supposedly, according to one account, it was dispatched to Medina, where the governor at the time, ʿAmr ibn Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ (d. 688), had it shrouded and buried in the cemetery of al-Baqīʿ, beside Fāṭima's grave.[81] There were in the turbulent decade following al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom many beheadings. But one story captures the mood. It concerns the head of ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād. A governor of Kūfa under the Sufyanid caliphs, he was directly implicated in the killing of al-Ḥusayn. Several years later, Kūfa had been lost to the forces of al-Mukhtār, the pro-ʿAlid rebel who proclaimed Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya as the Messiah. In 686, ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād set out with the armies of the caliphate in an attempt to establish Marwanid rule over the rebellious city. The endeavor cost him his life—and his head rolled, as a trophy of war. Rebels delivered it to al-Mukhtār, who sent it on to Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥananyya and al-Ḥusayn's son, ʿAlī. ʿAlī morbidly remarked: ‘“Ubaydallāh ibn Ziyād was brought al-Ḥusayn's head while he was having breakfast; we have been brought ʿUbaydallāh's head while we were having breakfast."[82] Considering the issue of dismemberment in general terms, jurists wondered if Muslims should pray for the head alone, after washing it and perfuming it with camphor, or for the headless body. Some felt prayer should happen only if the bulk of the body was present, and recommended praying for the part that had contained the *rūḥ*, or animating spirit. Others were somewhat more liberal, particularly in cases where mutilation had been the work of lions or birds. Divergence of opinion regarding prayer for the head alone may have been in part politically motivated.[83]

By creating categories of person whose prayer was not guaranteed, jurists betrayed a socially divisive vision. In their minds, the politics of exclusion served to reinforce a sense of social solidarity with an ideal community, no doubt accompanied by a sense of alienation from the real community, with its warts and imperfections. Yet the imaginative social divisions they drew sometimes disappeared magically, like lines on sand effaced by the geomancer’s hand. Washing the dead and praying for their welfare, argued al-Shāfiʿī, were part of the “custom of humankind” (*sunna min banī Ādam*) applicable to all Muslims aside from martyrs and other entities excepted by Muslim tradition.[84] Jurists ultimately resolved most cases in favor of prayer, evincing a merciful tendency in Islamic law to integrate Muslim outcasts. Muḥammad had declared: “Pray for the one from my community who has been stoned. … Abandon no one from my community [*ummatī*] without prayer.”[85] Muslims who deviated from the ideal mold were deemed “anomalous,” certainly, but not so “dangerous” as to be ostracized from the company of the holy.[86] Muḥammad did not pray indiscriminately, to be sure. Reportedly, he refused to pray for a person who had died insolvent. But this measure counted as a stalling tactic designed to get the account settled and to discourage others from dying this way. As soon as someone vouched to undertake the debt, Muḥammad agreed to pray.[87] At the end of the day, even the victim of suicide, who had felt so discontented in society and whose body would remain marked by death wounds in the hereafter, was usually forgiven by the community and prayed for as a fellow Muslim.[88]

CHAPTER SIX

The Politics of Burial and Tomb Construction

According to the Qur’ān, Cain inaugurated the human institution of burial after brutally murdering his brother and then wondering, as he succumbed to feebleness of spirit and feelings of repentance, how to hide the naked corpse. To instruct Cain in the art of burial, God dispatched a raven that dug in the earth. “Woe unto me!” exclaimed Cain (Qur‘ān 5:31). “Do I lack the strength to be like this raven and so conceal my brother’s disgraceful private parts [*saw’a*]?” Then Cain “became one of the remorseful.” The ritual thus had its origins in the act of fratricide. It served both to hide an abhorrent deed and prevent exposure of the human body.[1]

Reflecting on the origins of burial, Muslims thought also about the death of the first man, Adam. According to one account, as Adam was about to pass away, God sent angels to embalm his body and wrap it in shrouds. When Eve saw the angels, she tried to prevent them from performing their duties, but to no avail. Adam rebuffed her, “Leave me and my Lord’s messengers alone,” and blamed her for all the misfortunes he had ever suffered. Eve left, Adam died, and the angels washed and shrouded his corpse. Then they dug for him a grave with a niche (*laḥadū lahu*), buried him, and declared, “Let this be a custom for Adam’s children henceforth.”[2]

A counter-Enlightenment skeptic who believed the interpretation of ancient fables might lead toward the formulation of a universal history saw burial rites as “a great principle of humanity.” Giambattista Vico associated these rituals intimately with humanity as cultural and religious traditions that human beings shared with one another, not with other animals. Today we know that the evolution of anatomically modern humans did not coincide with the emergence of mortuary rituals. During most of our history as a species, we did not bury our dead. Still, like Vico and the Muslims who reflected on Adam’s death, anthropologists of the origins of culture continue to view burial as a quintessentially human practice. Its emergence over thirty thousand years ago marks a key transition (the “Great Leap Forward”) in the history of humankind, both in the *Homo sapiens sapiens* branch and in the Neanderthal branch.[3]

In Arabia on the eve of the coming of Islam, not all Arabs attained even a simple and unassuming burial. Bedouins hoped to be honored with a decent shroud, a neat pile of rocks to mark possession of the grave, and maybe an extravagant camel sacrifice. Yet they sometimes died alone, as wandering nomads, without receiving rites of inhumation. Warriors risked a similar end, for Arab tribes sometimes had to retreat quickly from the battlefield and abandon their dead unburied, a dreadful scenario invoked all too frequently by early Arabic poets reminiscing about the feasts of hyenas and vultures. Victorious poets boasted about leaving the enemy to such a fate.[4] Muslim martyrs did not meet so gruesome an end when their party managed to rescue their bodies. Still, they were buried hastily. Those who perished at the battle of Uḥud, for example, were interred two or three per grave, in their blood, without proper shrouds or even a prayer.[5] This was the common lot of those who died fighting in God’s path, though sometimes Muslims would try to grant their martyrs a more dignified burial. Jābir (ibn ‘Abdallāh, d. ca. 697) exhumed his father, one of the martyrs of Uḥud, after six months of burial, in order to grant him an individual grave and a proper shroud.[6]

Muslims knew that burial was not the custom of Adam’s children everywhere. In Mesopotamia, Iran, and elsewhere in the eastern lands of the caliphate, they lived near Zoroastrians, who exposed their dead upon funerary towers.[7] In addition, when they traveled beyond the boundaries of the world of Islam, they confronted exotic alternatives. The Hindus of Ceylon, remarked the author of *Akhbār al-Ṣīn wa `l-Hind,* cremated their dead, flinging the ashes into the air.[8] And the Rūs Vikings or Norsemen, as recounted by Ibn Faḍlān, laid their dead chief, garbed in golden raiment and accompanied by a sacrificial maiden, on a ship set aflame. To make obvious the point about the striking difference between foreign and Muslim customs, Ibn Faḍlān portrayed one of his ruddy characters commenting with dismay about the Arab practice of burying the dead in the earth, where corpses decompose all too slowly as creeping creatures devour the remaining flesh.[9]

In light of these foreign mores, medieval Muslims might have concluded that the practice of interment was culturally determined, whereas the drive to dispose of the dead in a meaningful, purposeful way was nearly universal. They did not draw this conclusion. To Muslims, the practice of burial that they shared with Jews and

Christians seemed to have originated at the very dawn of humanity. Perhaps it seemed sensible, in the monotheistic quest for communal distinction, to claim that the roots of shared customs stretched back to a remote past before the emergence of Christianity or Judaism. The alternative—to concede that the “custom of Adam’s children” had become the custom of Jews, of Christians, and eventually of Muslims—seemed far less attractive.

The story about the death of Adam and the origins of burial is interesting also for another reason. It specifies that Adam’s wife played no role in the ritual. Angels buried the corpse in accordance with Adam’s dictates. As he lay dying, the first man settled a question of power; he decided to deprive Eve of agency and to empower instead the Lord’s messengers. Adam’s choice brings up an issue, often discussed by jurists, of who should have the right to act on behalf of the dead. Different actors, ranging from corpse washers to gravediggers, played leading roles in the rites of death. But they did not perform rituals of equal importance and visibility. Politically speaking, the leader of the funeral prayer played the key role in the mass for the dead. Like the conductor of a requiem, he directed on a public stage the physical gestures and speech acts of an assembly of mourners. For this reason, jurists came to establish a hierarchy of potential prayer leaders. An examination of that hierarchy will reveal how they tried to balance governmental prerogatives, religious distinctions, and kinship priorities, as they pondered who ought to rule the community of Muslims gathered to pray for the dead. Political and religious leaders competed with one another for the privilege of leading the funeral prayer. Their contest for power continued after burial, as each camp tried to inspire and persuade Muslim followers with different visions of the perfect tomb structure. The caliphate displayed its glory and might by erecting a grand shrine at the grave of Muḥammad. But pietists decried this lavish monument; they argued that in death all Muslims should lie in low graves facing the Kaʿba, the building in the court of the Great Mosque of Mecca that contains a sacred black stone.

The Funeral Hierarchy: Governors, Patriarchs, and Husbands

The jurist al-Shāfiʿī (d. 820) defined inhumation (*dafn*), alongside the washing of the corpse and the funerary prayer, as a “right [of the deceased] incumbent upon the people” (*ḥaqq ʿala `l-nās*). He conceived of it as a special type of obligation, similar to holy war, that required communal rather than individual action. Muslims considered this kind of duty (*farḍ kifāya*) fulfilled so long as several members of society took it upon themselves to act on behalf of everyone.[10] Yet to pray for and then bury the dead in an orderly and coordinated way, the community needed a leader. To exercise leadership in the funerals of famous women and men was a privilege and an honor.

Governmental figures, religious dignitaries, and family members were interested in leading these events in part because they tended to draw large crowds. Just about anybody who counted could expect at least forty but easily over a hundred intercessors at his or her funeral, as we can deduce from traditions regarding the minimal size of the crowd needed for prayer to succeed.[11] Notable funerals were of course far better attended. One historian was so impressed by the size of the crowd at Ibn Ḥanbal's funeral in 855 that he estimated six hundred thousand intercessors.[12] Naturally, wherever large crowds were to be found, caliphs and governors felt eager to perform. Caliph ʻUmar I gathered the people to pray for Māriya the Copt (d. 637), Muḥammad's concubine and the mother of his son, Ibrāhīm.[13] Marwān, as governor of Medina, prayed over Ḥafṣa (d. 665), caliph ʻUmar's daughter, after bearing her bedstead part of the way toward the grave.[14] Saʻīd ibn al-ʻĀṣ, another of Medina's governors during the caliphate of Muʻāwiya, supposedly prayed for Umm Kulthūm, the wife of ʻUmar and the daughter of ʻAlī and Fāṭima.[15] While on a visit to Medina, the Damascene caliph Hishām (r. 724–743) prayed for Sālim ibn ʻAbdallāh (d. ca. 724), ʻUmar's grandson, "because there was a multitude of people."[16] Hārūn al-Rashīd performed the humble grace of praying for one of his appointed judges, the son of the great-granddaughter of Ḥanẓala, whose corpse angels had washed at some point in the seventh century.[17]

When caliphs or governors were unavailable or unwilling, lower officials frequently took charge of the ceremony. Thus the commander of the police in Baṣra led the prayer over ʻAbdallāh ibn ʻAwn (d. 768), collector of oral traditions, shunner of Qadarite heretics, and landlord of a house that included both Christian and Muslim tenants.[18] One of Baṣra's judges at the beginning of the ninth century prayed for Bishr ibn ʻUmar, a transmitter of Malik's law.[19] Governors did not always choose to exercise their right to lead; sometimes they delegated the responsibility. In 736, while in charge of Medina, Khālid ibn ʻAbdallāh ibn al-Ḥārith asked for Sukayna bint al-Ḥusayn ibn ʻAlī's funeral to be delayed. Since he did not appear at the cemetery of al-Baqīʻ until midday (*ẓuhr*), the family feared "she would be altered" (*tughayyaru*). Her corpse, in other words, would begin to smell and decompose. Not wishing to be embarrassed in this way, her family "bought for her camphor," an odoriferous substance, "for thirty dinars." However, when Khālid finally arrived, "he ordered" a Medinese judge, Shayba ibn

Naṣāḥ (d. ca. 747), to lead the prayer. It is unclear why, at the last moment, Khālid decided against directing himself this ceremony in honor of ʻAlī's granddaughter. Perhaps her reputation as a brazen and dissolute woman made him reconsider the initial plan.[20]

A conflict of priority sometimes arose, pitting governors against sons. When the governor of Kūfa, ʻAmr ibn Ḥurayth (d. 704), sought to lead the prayer for Abū Sarīḥa (Ḥudhayfa, d. 662), the deceased man's son exclaimed, "O Commander, my father stipulated that Zayd ibn Arqam [d. 685 / 686]," one of the Prophet's Companions, "pray over him." So Zayd stepped forward instead of the governor.[21] Negotiations between sons and governors could serve to diffuse potential tension, particularly when it was unclear who had the right to exercise leadership. At the funeral of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya (d. 700), a man on whose behalf a Shīʻite revolt occurred, the son of the deceased protested that Medina's governor, Abān ibn ʻUthmān, will not lead the prayer for him "unless he [the governor] requests this from us." "You are more entitled with respect to your corpses" (*antum awlā bi-jināzatikum*), declared the governor, "so send forward one who will pray" (*fa-qaddimū man yuṣallī*). Humbled, the rebel's son said, "Step forward and pray" "On this day," he supposedly declared, "we know that the Imam is more qualified [*awlā*] in prayer. Were it not so, we would not have advanced you." It is clear in the Arabic that the conflict centered on agency and power, or *wilāya,* with the *walī* (the relative legally in charge of the funeral) ultimately submitting in this case to the *wālī* (the executive ruler).[22]

Pietists who felt it was their prerogative to lead funerary prayers challenged the government's claim to sovereignty. ʻAbdallāh ibn Mughaffal (d. ca. 679), the Baṣran Weeper who would have no candles in his funeral procession, decreed during his final illness that "only my companions should administer" my burial rites. Ibn Ziyād, the governor of Baṣra, "is not to pray over me." When he died, Ibn Ziyād showed up in front of the house with his retinue. Told of Ibn Mughaffal's wishes, he "accompanied them" until he reached al-Bayḍā', the city's white castle. He then left the companions of the deceased in charge.[23]

Men of religion placed men devoted to the Qur'ān at the pinnacle of society. When Salama al-Jarmī asked God's Messenger, "Who should lead us in prayer?" Muḥammad replied, "The one who knows the most Qur'ān." Salama's son claimed in his father's obituary, "My father used to lead them in the prayer in their mosque and he led their funeral prayers. No one contended with him for that [privilege] until his death." Salama began this career at a precocious age, having memorized the Qur'ān by the age of six. His debut unfortunately received a mixed review from a tribeswoman. Apparently his cloak had been cut too short, so that his buttocks showed whenever he performed a prostration.[24] At any rate, men of religion often stipulated in their wills their desire to be blessed by one of their counterparts. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who had led the funeral prayer for a Shīʿite collector of traditions accustomed to dyeing his beard blond, Abū Naḍra, denied Thābit al-Bunānī the honor of leading the prayer in the funeral of his own daughter. Instead al-Ḥasan granted Ibn Sīrīn the privilege.[25] A prayer from a pious Muslim was considered so valuable that Ibn Sīrīn was released from jail (temporarily) in order to wash, shroud, and pray over the corpse of Anas ibn Malik (d. ca. 711), in fulfillment of the dying man's wishes. This wealthy pietist, whose grave goods included a tuft of Muḥammad's hair, was buried in his palace in al-Ṭaff.[26]

"When I die," willed the caliph Muʿāwiya II (d. 684), "have al-Walid ibn ʿUtba [ibn Abī Sufyān] pray over me. Let al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays lead the people in prayer [*yuṣallī bi `l-nās*]," presumably at the mosque in Damascus, "until the people themselves choose, and someone assumes the caliphate."[27] It is impossible to know whether or not this seventh-century caliph really specified before death what the ninth-century biographer Ibn Saʿd reported. But the end of the report is suspect, as it plays neatly into the politics of succession. It represents the last of the Sufyanid caliphs designating two men closely associated with the Sufyanid regime as potential successors, while refusing to nominate anyone in particular for the caliphate. As things turned out, a power struggle ensued, from which a new dynasty emerged, with Marwān as its founding father. Ibn Saʿd actually narrates the story in his biographical entry on Marwan, portraying the future caliph in attendance mocking the dead one. The enmity between Marwān and al-Walīd ibn ʿUtba is well known; in favor of the latter, a Sufyanid governor had at one time deposed the first from the position of governor of Medina.

The founding father of the Marwanid dynasty often served as a symbol of worldly practices against which pietists reacted. They loved to point out how Marwān's actions were all wrong.[28] They told a story, for example, about his failed attempt to usurp the righteous leadership in prayer over one of the Muslim notables, al-Arqam (d. 675), an early convert to Islam from the Qurashī tribe and a participant in the most prestigious battles. Al-Arqam had willed for his contemporary Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ (d. ca. 675) to lead his funeral prayer. This Companion of the Prophet, commander of Arab armies, and founder and first governor of the garrison of Kūfa presided over the funeral, but only after Marwān quarreled with al-Arqam's son ʿUbaydāllāh over the privilege.[29] What was the moral of this pietistic story? Simply to show that Marwān's, and by implication any caliph's or governor's, move for leadership in this sphere was questionable and problematic if not backed by the will of the deceased.

Marwan was the governor of Medina at the time of the death of Muḥammad's wife 'Ā'isha. Yet he left town before her burial to perform the lesser pilgrimage, and in his absence appointed Abū Hurayra as deputy (*istakhlafa*). It was thus Abū Hurayra, rather than the governor, who led the funerary prayer. We have seen earlier how the traditionist Ibn 'Umar, present at the event, "did not condemn it." But what appeared objectionable? Apparently it seemed troubling to those who would keep government out of religion that Abū Hurayra had led the funerary prayer as an agent of Marwān's government. Indeed, on a different occasion, the blameless ascetic Abū Dharr allegedly rebuffed Abū Hurayra for acting the part of governor. After a protest of incorruptibility, Abū Hurayra was excused.[30]

This tension between pietistic and governmental claims to leadership is perhaps unremarkable, as historians of early Islam have explored the nexus of religion and politics in depth.[31] More surprising are the negotiations between governors and sons over control of a father's funeral prayer. Here was an arena where a son, possessing the will of the father, could try gently to dismiss a governor's offer to bestow the gift of prayer.

The anecdotes so far analyzed suggest a well-defined legal problem concerning the right to lead funerary prayers. How did jurists resolve the issue of priority? Some of them considered, in the first place, the wishes of the deceased. If the deceased had designated by testament an authority to lead the funerary ceremony, then this man (known as the *waṣiyy*) should have precedence over all others. To choose one's own man for a last prayer was represented as a right of the dead (*ḥaqq li`l-mayyit*). So long as he was not corrupt, an innovator, a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian, the executor of the will of the deceased seemed perfectly suitable.[32] However, if the deceased had failed to appoint a prayer leader or had appointed an individual whose authority was, for one or another reason, challenged, then who should have the prerogative to lead? A member of the family, a religious authority, or a state representative? Medieval jurists provided divergent answers to this question. They weighed the claim to power of the political authority (*wālī*) against the claim to power of the familial authority (*wālī*).

The fact that a funeral was a public event held in the city's cemetery lent support to the first claim, that leadership in this realm should be a governmental prerogative. However, because the purpose of the ceremony was to intercede for God's mercy on behalf of the deceased, there was reason to counter that the relative legally entitled to act on behalf of the deceased should be the master of ceremonies. Alongside several other jurists, al-Shāfi'ī held that the dead man's or woman's legal representative (*walī*), typically a paternal relative, should precede even the governor (*al-wālī*). Prayer for the deceased "is one of the personal affairs" (*al-umūr al-khāṣṣa*), he opined, where "the familial agent is more entitled than the ruler" (*arā al-walīaḥaqqa bihā min al-wālī*). The power to act derives, in this case, "from the steadfastness of paternal relations" (*al-walī aḥaqqu li-annahā wilāyatun tatarattabu bi-tarattubi `l-‘aṣabāt*). This ruling was controversial, however, given the principle that "a man should not lead another man in prayer in [a place where the latter has] authority" (*lā ya'ummu al-rajulu `r-rajula fā sulṭānihi*). The governor, in other words, should not be forced to follow the directives of the father of the deceased.[33]

With this consideration in mind, many Sunni jurists elevated political and religious authorities over and above paternal relatives. A Mālikite code of law placed the just governor (*al-wālī al-akbar* or *amīr al-madīna*), to whom obedience is to be rendered, in the highest position. Next in line it empowered the city's prayer leader (*imām al-miṣr*). Were neither to attend, then the judge, the chief of police, or the commander of the army could lead, though only if he had experience administering the prayer and delivering the sermon (*khuṭba*). Otherwise, if a judge or a police officer provided him with the "the prerogative of rule" (*sulṭān al-ḥukm*), the "master of prayer and of the pulpit" (*ṣāḥib al-ṣalāt wa `l-minbar*) could preside. All of these officials, possessing in the first place political authority and in the second place the faculty to lead in prayer, enjoyed precedence over the agents (*awliyā'*) of the deceased.[34]

Privileging political power, Sunni jurists related an anecdote about the funeral of al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Ali (d. ca. 669/670), the second Imam of the Shī‘ites. Attending the ceremony were both al-Ḥasan's brother, al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, and Medina's governor, Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣ. The brother deferred to the Umayyad, Sunnis claimed, in accordance with traditional custom. This appeared as a fitting end for al-Ḥasan, an Imam remembered first for abdicating the caliphate in favor of Mu ‘āwiya and then for submitting quietly to Umayyad rule.[35]

Beholden to the Fāṭimid caliphs, an Ismā‘ili judge likewise maintained on ‘Alī's authority that the sovereign *Sulṭān* had preeminence in leading funerals. But Shī‘ite jurists under Sunni rule had reasons to be skeptical of any proposition that implied submission to the powers that be. Twelvers held that the legal representative of the deceased had the foremost right to select a prayer leader. Yet they qualified his privilege in two ways. If the Just Imam happened to attend the ceremony, then he should have the prerogative to lead the prayer. In his absence, if a Hāshimite leader (that is, an ‘Alid or an ‘Abbasid ruler supported by Shī‘ites) happened to be present, then he should lead, provided the representative of the deceased nominates him. A ruler who would dare to advance to pray for the dead without attaining this nomination would be deemed a usurper (*ghāṣib*). Clearly, this pro-Hāshimite ruling arose in reaction to Umayyad claims to power.[36]

This legal discussion, which presumes caliphs and governors were eager to exercise power over funerals, applied in practice only to the well-attended funerals of prominent women and men. High officials of the caliphate had no interest in presiding over all commemorative ceremonies. Funerals in honor of the lowly attracted relatively small crowds and no caliphs. Yet in these modest, common ceremonies a contest over power might also emerge, jurists realized. In the shadows of the caliphate, this struggle for power within the family seems far more significant, historically speaking, than the largely theoretical conflict between caliphs and kinsmen.

At these ordinary events, paternal relatives (*aqrab al-‘aṣabah*) frequently claimed the power to lead in prayer. Sunni jurists debated whether the father, grandfather, or son should lead the family. Malik reportedly elevated the son over the father “because he is stronger than him in his claim to paternal kinship.” The fact that he receives a larger share of the inheritance indicates the son’s strength (*li-annahu aqwā taṣīban minhu, bi-dalīl al-irth*).[37] Al-Shāfi‘ī gave precedence instead to the father, followed by the paternal grandfather, the son, the grandson, the brother, and so on. “Then follow the people’s kin on the father’s side, not on the mother’s side” (*laysa min qibal al-umm*), he continued, “due to the power derived from paternal kinship” (*wilāya li`l-‘aṣaba*).[38] If none of the male relatives by blood could attend the funeral, then the paternal relatives by marriage (*nasab*), the benefactor (*al-mawlā al-mun‘im*) or his closest kinsman, the male relatives on the maternal side (*dhawū arḥāmiḥi*), and male strangers all vied for power.[39] In commanding this ritual, agnatic kinsmen outranked maternal and uxorial kinsmen.

“And who has more of a right in [leading] the prayer,” the jurist al-Shaybānī was asked, “the male cousin on the father’s side [*ibn al-‘amm*] or her husband?” “But of course this cousin has more of a right,” he replied, “whenever she does not have a son from him” (*bal ibn al-‘amm aḥaqqu min al-zawj idhā lam yakun laḥā minhu ibn*). In other words, a husband seemed potentially more entitled than a paternal cousin only in the event that the deceased woman had given birth to his son.[40] His power to act derived in this case not merely from his having been the husband of the deceased woman but from his paternal connection to the deceased woman’s son. The underlying message was evident: power in the rule of the family derived from patriarchal principles. A paternal cousin, in this system, ranked higher than a mere husband. To rise from this low position in the echelon, a husband would need to become a father. A Mālikite hierarchy of potential prayer leaders to be drawn from within the ranks of the extended family group similarly emphasized the low priority of the husband vis-à-vis the paternal relatives of a deceased woman. This list flowed in the following way, from high to low: the son and the grandson, the father, the brother, the nephew, the grandfather, the uncle on the father's side, the cousin on the father's side even if removed, and the benefactors (*mawlā al-niʿma*). "And all of them have more of a right than the husband," the list concludes, "while he is most entitled to lower her into her grave" (*wa-kulluhum awlā min al-zawj, wa-huwa awlā bi-inzālihā fī qabrihā*).[41]

Eventually, most representatives of the four Sunni schools of law came to espouse, in the postclassical period, this order privileging even a distant paternal kinsman over a husband. The low status of the latter was justified, according to Ibn Qudāma (d. 1223), because "the husband's spousal bond ceases with death, and so he becomes a stranger." Kinship ties, by contrast, endured beyond the moment of death. However, there had existed no consensus in the formative period of Islam about the right order. Certain jurists had considered a husband more entitled than agnates, reminding the opposition that Abū Bakra (d. ca. 670), an emancipated slave and a Companion of the Prophet, had "prayed over his wife, even though her brothers did not permit him." Curiously, the Kūfan jurist Abū Ḥanīfa attributed a preference for the father over the husband to al-Ḥasan the Baṣran, not to any Kūfan authority. The original Kūfan position, traced from Abū Ḥanīfa to Ḥammād (ibn Abī Sulaymān, d. ca. 738) and in turn to Ibrahim (al-Nakhaʿī, d. ca. 714), ranked the husband above the father, as second only to the neighborhood's Imam. An early Kūfan jurist, al-Shaʿbī (d. ca. 722), seems to have favored the husband as well. In addition, some would argue despite reports to the contrary that Ibn Ḥanbal had actually supported the priority of the husband over kinsmen. All of this divergence suggests that the mainstream Sunni position ranking agnates above husbands emerged only at some point after the death of the founders of the schools of law.[42]

In contrast to what became over time the mainstream Sunni position, Twelver Shīʿite law advanced a different kind of patriarchy. "The husband is more entitled" to lead the prayer "than the father, the son, and the brother," declared the sixth Imam, Abū ʿAbdallāh (Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, d. 765). Defending the husband's preeminence, Twelver Shīʿites recalled his right to control another death ritual: the washing of a wife's corpse. (The majority of Sunni jurists, Mālikites excepted, questioned this right.) If Sunnis gave precedence to paternal kin following the order of priorities established by inheritance laws, Twelver Shīʿites did not feel compelled to follow suit, for their inheritance laws did not systematically demote maternal kin.[43]

Shīʿites of all colors did not necessarily share the position of Twelver

Shī‘ites, which favored the husband. Relying on the authority of ‘Ali (d. 661), the influential Ismā’īli judge al-Nu’mān (d. 974) granted priority to paternal kinsmen.[44] His formulation echoes the Sunni rather than the Twelver Shī‘ite position. Most interesting, however, is a Zaydi formulation. Asked about a man who had led the prayer for his deceased wife, having claimed that her paternal kinsmen (*‘aṣaba*) did not have greater agency with respect to her, the jurist Zayd ibn ‘Ali (d. 740) demurred. “Whenever a woman passes away,” he contended, “the closest agnatic relative of the people prays for her, and the husband does not have the right to lead the prayer over her unless her agnates allow him” (*wa-laysa li-zawjihā an yuṣalliya ‘alayhā iliā an ta’dhana lahu ‘aṣabatuhā*). “Under my father,” he continued, there was a woman from the tribe of Banu Sulaym who died. “My father sought permission from her agnates to pray for her,” and they said, “Pray, God have mercy on you.”[45] Accordingly, the Zaydi position can be described as a moderate version of the mainstream Sunni position. In this case, though the priority of the agnates is acknowledged, the husband is not dismissed. Instead, after politely negotiating with the agnates, he finds himself elevated to the role of prayer leader.

However important it is to note the lack of a united front on the side of the Shī‘ite sects or the existence of internal dissension within the Sunni ranks, what matters more is the distinction drawn between the mainstream Sunni and the Twelver Shī‘ite positions. Both systems favored patriarchs and male progeny as leaders of the funeral prayer, but not to the same degree. While the Sunni system favored a wife’s father, for instance, the Twelver Shī‘ite system favored a daughter’s husband. The wife’s male as well as her female progeny were treated rather equitably as heirs by Twelver Shī‘ite law. Effectively, the Sunni system privileged agnatic patriarchs from the extended family, whereas the Twelver Shī‘ite system enforced ties within the nuclear family.[46]

An Imam of Their Own

So far we have focused on male authorities—governors, pietists, patriarchs, and husbands—while considering the question of leadership in the funeral prayer. But how were women integrated into the hierarchy of potential prayer leaders? Whenever the crowd of eligible prayer leaders consisted of slaves, madmen, children, and women, jurists muddled the question of priority, as if at a loss to determine precisely who might be capable of leading. Al-Shāfi‘ī held that a male slave (*mamlūk*) accompanying the wives of the dead man should lead them, unless he lacked the mental ability to comprehend the prayer.[47] As for the case of an exclusive gathering of women and prepubescent boys, no one from either sex (*aḥad al-jinsayn*) could act as an Imam over the entire group. So each kind (*naw*ʿ) should pray by itself, with its own prayer leader. The female Imam, in the absence of males, should stand "in their midst" (*fi wasaṭihinnd*). Reportedly Abū Ḥanīfa, al-Shāfiʾī, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal all "advocated for the women to pray divided, without any one of them preceding the others" (*yuṣallīna mufradātin, lāyasbiqu baʿḍuhunna baʿḍan*). They entitled the women to pray as a "single group" (*jamāʿa*). Mālik, according to Saḥnūn, did not find it in any way problematic for a group of women to pray on behalf of a dead man, provided no men were at hand to do the honor. No single woman should lead the rest, however, as would an Imam. The women should line up in rows but pray individually, steered as a ship without a rudder.[48]

Visits to the cemetery provided one of the few occasions in the course of everyday life when in the absence of free adult men a woman might have been able in theory to play the part of Imam. Muslim jurists were aware that here, at the graveside, women had the opportunity to lead, and that such an opportunity could not easily present itself in the mosque, where men were always to be found. Yet both Sunnis and Shīʿites questioned the validity of a funeral prayer led by a woman. Thus Twelver Shīʿites decreed, in agreement with Sunnis, that women should pray in "a single row, without any woman preceding" the others.[49] Abū Jaʿfar (Muḥammad al-Bāqir, d. ca. 735), the fifth of the Imams according to Twelver and Ismāʿīli Shīʿites, was asked, "Can a woman lead the women in prayer?" "No," replied he, "unless over the dead, whenever there is nobody with more power [*awlā*] than her." In this case, the leading woman should stand in the same row with the other women, without protruding: "So she praises God's greatness, and they praise God's greatness."[50]

One Muslim sect did envision a social order where, in the absence of men at a funeral, a woman could stand in a symbolic position of power. On the authority of Abū ʿUbayda (Muslim al-Tamīmī, d. ca. 767), the earliest Ibāḍi Khārijite legal treatise empowered a woman to orchestrate the praises of God, provided she stands amidst the women. The lawbook's author, Abī Ghānim Bishr ibn Ghānim, recorded an even more permissive alternative, enabling the leading woman to "stand out slightly from the rest. Even if she should stand out like a man [*wa-in barazat ka `l-rajul*], she would not pervert" the prayer in honor of the deceased.[51] This willingness to envisage women as prayer leaders accords with our emerging understanding of Khārijite politics, for these egalitarian-minded opponents of Umayyad rule emphasized merit rather than gender or genealogy as the essential requirement for leading true Muslims. At least one Khārijite, Shabīb (d.

697), apparently considered women potentially qualified to lead the caliphate, and women were required to participate, as warriors, in the holy war waged by Khārijite troops.[52]

The "solutions" of Muslim jurists—Khārijites excepted—sought only to accentuate rather than resolve the problem of leadership in the absence of adult men. Sunnis and Twelver Shīʿites might have elaborated a mimetic model. They might have argued that women should pray as the men, in rows and with a leader in front. As a legal precedent, they might have advanced the report that the Prophet's wives had led the prayer for Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ in the mosque. (This event became controversial, to be sure. But the people who protested it did so, according to the story, because the event took place in a mosque and delayed the burial. There is no suggestion, in the oral tradition, that the protesters were in any way troubled by the fact that women had played a leading role.) So why, in light of this tradition, did so many jurists choose to legislate against a last prayer led by a woman? Ibn Qudāma would explain that their judgment was based in part on the consensus *ijmāʿ*) they had reached.[53]

To pray without an empowered Imam, the jurist al-Shāfiʿī suggested, was a sign of mutual rivalry (*tanāfus*).[54] This kind of social disorder, represented by the image of women praying without a man, was perhaps reminiscent of the situation immediately after the death of the Prophet. On that occasion, the Muslim community lost its divine guide while history dragged on. Men, women, and children entered separately to pay their respects in the funerary chamber. All prayed without a designated leader (*lam ya'umma al-nās … aḥad*).[55] Discussions in Islamic law concerning the role that women should or should not play in administering funerary prayers did not necessarily hark back to this dire time when the last of the Prophets died. Yet they served to accentuate the notion that no effective leadership could exist without men. In practice, a woman might have qualified to lead her cohorts—on account of her knowledge of religious matters, her matrilineal ties to the deceased, her eloquence, wit, or personal charm. However, in theory, funerals were not to devolve, like some charivari, into a topsy-turvy affair. In the social hierarchy advocated by Islamic law, a woman could never be on top.

Gestures of Leadership, or The Imam and the Hermaphrodite

Once a prayer leader was designated, he had to stand in the right place. Some jurists advised him to place himself in front of a man's navel or midpoint but in front of a woman's shoulders or breasts.[56]

Others argued for alternative positions. The Imam should place himself in front of the dead man's head but in front of the dead woman's pelvis. This latter position had the advantage of protecting the woman's private parts from the eyes of the tribe. It seemed most appropriate when she had died at childbirth or when she lacked a contraption, such as an Ethiopian bier, that would conceal her from the shame of exposure.[57]

Besides standing in one or another position, the prayer leader needed to arrange the intercessors in rows and orchestrate the praises of God. On the very day the Negus of Ethiopia died, Muḥammad told the Muslims to "seek forgiveness for your brother" (*istaghfirū li-akhīkum*), who had allegedly converted to Islam. Then he lined up the community in rows behind him while they pronounced several times, "Allah is great."[58] Jurists representing various schools debated endlessly whether worshippers should utter four, five, seven, or more such praises (*takbīrāt*), and whether to raise the hands only after the first utterance. Because a Muslim could not prostrate himself during the funeral as during the ordinary prayer—"All the world is a place of prostration except for the cemetery and the bathhouse"—these alternative gestures of prayer took on added significance.[59] Local traditions developed. In many places, Muslims preferred four praises, but in Damascus some preferred five. Sectarian traditions also developed, with Twelver Shīʿites advocating multiple praises, up to eleven. Notwithstanding these distinctions, jurists generally insisted on the necessity of following the leader's cue, no matter what tradition an individual preferred. In this way, the ritual order would be ensured and the officiating authority obeyed.[60]

In the ideal world envisioned by the pietists who despised wailers, no woman would attend the cemetery to ruin their Muslim ceremony. In the real world, women managed to reach the graveside, despite pietists' protestations, with a prayer for the deceased on their lips. What should be done with these women? Could they line up in a row behind the men? Would their presence render the prayer invalid? Jurists gave little thought to these questions, perhaps because they were reluctant to speculate about the place of women in a ceremony from which, it had been argued, women should be barred. Nevertheless, such questions were raised and on occasion answered. In this connection, the jurist al-Shaybānī (d. 805) was asked: "What is your opinion about a group of people who wish to pray over the bier, and with them there are women, where should the women line up?" "Behind the rows of men," he replied. The inquirer persisted: "And if a woman stands in the row with them or stands by the Imam's sandals, and prays with the men?" Even so, he replied, "their prayer as single group" should count as "perfect," for it is not like a "prescribed prayer" (

Ṣalāt maktūba).[61] By joining the men in the front row, a woman might violate the ideal social order, yet her action would not invalidate the ritual in honor of the dead.

Difficult as it was for Imams to separate unruly women from the crowd of men, they could easily divide corpses into two groups according to their sex. In times of war or plague, with a multitude of dead beings waiting to be ushered to the grave, an Imam was empowered to conduct a single ceremony in honor of a great number of deceased women and men. All he needed to do was follow the example of three men. In Medina, Malik reported, caliph ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (d. 656), the traditionist ‘Abū Hurayra (d. ca. 678), and the traditionist Abdallah ibn ‘Umar (d. 693) used to pray over several biers at once, biers of men and of women. They would place deceased males closest to the Imam and deceased females closest to the Ka‘ba.[62]

Sex was the key consideration, of course: males in the first row, females in the last. The position of dead women in these communal burials was not disadvantageous. On the contrary, for if “the best of the rows in prayer is up front,” where the living men lined up, then “the best of the rows of the deceased is the last.” The last position was deemed advantageous on account of its proximity to Mecca and for another reason: the row of dead men would work effectively as “a shield [*sutra*] for the [dead] women,” serving as a barrier between them and the company of men occupying the front row.[63] Angered perhaps by the notion that dead women were placed closer to the Ka‘ba than dead men, an unidentified man protested this order and demanded an explanation. “This is the traditional way, the *sunna,”* he was reassured.[64]

It was not only sex but also other categories of social differentiation that jurists considered when addressing the issue of ordering multiple biers. They also factored in age, social status, and confessional affiliation. The Imam, advised jurists, should place the “people of age and honor” (*ahl al-sinn wa `l-faḍl*) closest to him. Shī‘ites, following the *Book of ‘Alī,* would advance men first. Next in this hierarchy of the deceased came male slaves, male children, and finally women.[65] However important were such divisions between the young and old and the free and the enslaved, what concerned jurists most was the issue of sexual differentiation.

Their central, nearly obsessive, interest in this mode of social analysis is best illustrated by the following distinction. If, amongst the multiplicity of dead bodies, there were any hermaphrodites (*khanāthā*), then these should occupy the middle row.[66] This vision of the social order might strike us as the Islamic counterpart of Aristophanes’ myth of the round androgynous creature that disappeared with the straightening of the sexes. But underlying the odd prescription was a serious patriarchal concern with the separation of society according to sex. The gendered hierarchy of jurists did transcend the legalistic imagination. Any self-respecting Imam would refuse to lead the funerary service until the community submitted to his expectations. If women happened to attend the ceremony, he would ask them to occupy the last row in resigned silence or to exit the grounds of the cemetery.[67] Once the community lined up in neat rows, according to the script, the Imam would be ready to proceed. Standing in the right place, he would signal first for the funerary prayer to begin and then for the corpse to be lowered into the grave.

Inserting the Corpse Into the Tomb

The prophet Muḥammad descended into his wife Khadīja's grave in that age before the Hijra when, according to tradition, Muslims did not yet have a funeral prayer.[68] It is possible that already in pre-Islamic times Arabs granted social and religious significance to the act of descending into the grave.[69] However, what matters for our purposes is that this ritual, regardless of its origins, began succumbing to the pressure of Islamization. Thus, upon inserting the dead into the grave, Ibn ʻUmar would pronounce: "In the name of God and according to the confessional community [*ʻalā milla*] of God's Messenger." Abū Khālid preferred a different incantation: "In the name of God and according to the traditional custom [*sunna*] of God's Messenger."[70] Muslims became interested not only in these utterances but also in other aspects of the ritual. They endeavored to define the proper, Islamic manner of inserting the corpse into the tomb and to establish which social actors were best suited to perform the ritual. Their concern with this ritual had no parallel in Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian funerary laws.

A discussion in al-Shāfiʻī's *Kitāb al-Umm* regarding the direction of insertion assumes the prophet Muḥammad was buried facing the *qibla,* and it must have been just so. In the late eighth century, the question to settle was whether the corpse had been pulled gently into the grave headfirst or inserted horizontally from the direction of the *qibla.* A number of trustworthy informants (*thiqāt*), taking into account the proximity of the grave to a certain wall, concluded the Prophet could not have been inserted transversely from the direction of the *qibla.* Al-Shāfiʻī conceded some discrepancy in the oral traditions about this matter, proposed that this was "one of the general affairs for which the Oral Tradition is dispensable" (*wa-huwa min al-umūr al-ʻāmma allatī yustaghnā fihā `an al-ḥadīth*), and recommended gentle burial headfirst.[71] This account is cited not so as to contribute to the biography of the Prophet, but for different reasons. It shows how, nearly two centuries after Muḥammad’s death, a Muslim jurist began to puzzle over the discrepancy between two current fashions of burial and their potential conformity to an ancient model. It is a noteworthy instance of legal reasoning taking into account material evidence contradicting an oral tradition. It provides evidence of an ever more ambitious attempt to inflect every aspect of death with an Islamic accent. Finally, it demonstrates how much jurists cared about the ritual of insertion.

This ritual was a source of social distinction. Ibn Isḥāq’s *Life of Muḥammad* names those who descended into the Prophet’s empty grave: ‘Ali, the sons of ‘Abbās, and Shuqrān, the Apostle’s freedman. Aws ibn Khawli pleaded with ‘Ali for the opportunity, and apparently was let in. Al-Mughira ibn Shu‘ba used to brag that he had purposely dropped his ring into the grave at the last minute. The contrived accident enabled him to jump inside to retrieve his possession and in this way gain the distinction of being “the last man to be with him.” But his claim was disputed: “He lies. The last man to be with the apostle was Qutham ibn ‘Abbas.”[72]

Islamic law devoted scant attention to the rules for entering a man’s grave. Al-Shāfi‘i, considered by many the master of Islamic jurisprudence, elevated to the highest position “the one with most knowledge of jurisprudence” (*afqah*). Next in his hierarchy was the closest (male) relative on the mother’s side (*aqrab bihi raḥiman*).[73] While paternal kinsmen had priority in administering the funeral prayer, maternal kinsmen had priority in lowering the corpse. On a symbolic plane, the second rite appeared as a return to the mother’s womb (*raḥim*), orchestrated by the men related to it. More importantly, however, the shifting of priorities allowed the patriarchs from the mother’s side of the family to take the leading role in one of the rituals to dispatch their deceased relative.

What drew jurists’ minds was the entry of men into the tombs of women. Al-Shāfi‘ā asserted that unless a man is nowhere to be found, “women enter neither the grave of a man nor of a woman.”[74] Women were encouraged to manage but one component of the ritual: the untying of the knots (*ḥall `uqad ‘anhā*). This refers to the knots fastening together the shrouds in which the woman had been cocooned. The knots undone, her countenance became unveiled. If no women appeared, then Muslim men (preferably close kin) performed the act, permissible only because “she had already died so the rules of the living no longer applied to her” (*qad ṣārat mayyitatan wa `nqaṭa‘a ‘anhā ‘anhā ḥukm al-ḥayāt*).[75]

At Umm Kulthūm’s burial, her father asked, “Is there anyone here who yielded not to desire last night?” Having refrained from sex, Abū

Ṭalḥa volunteered, and so went down into the grave of Muḥammad’s daughter with a pure body and a pure soul.[76] When Muḥammad descended into the tomb of Umm Rūmān bint `Umayr, his wife ‘Ā’isha’s mother, he declared her as beautiful as a houri.[77] Jurists held that in the absence of male relatives to enter a woman’s grave, old men must proceed because they are “the least lustful and farthest from sexual temptation” (*al-mashāyikh li-annahum aqallu shahwatan wa-ab‘adu min al-fitna*).[78] If, before inserting the corpse into the tomb, a man partially undressed, he grew aware of his proximity to the body of the deceased. Removing one’s cloak and wrapping it around the waist to bare one’s back was a symbol of mourning.[79] But practical reasons —reluctance to sully one’s clothing—dictated this measure. “It is not necessary,” jurists clarified, “for anyone to enter the grave in shoes or slippers, with a turban, a wrap covering the upper half of the body, or a capuche.”[80]

Whoever had been entitled to visit the woman’s private quarters while she was alive could go into her grave. (This kind of access was known as *al-wulūj,* the penetration.) Socially qualified were a brother, a sister’s son, and any man of the household. Caliph ‘Umar, after approving of the Ethiopian bier, selected Muḥammad ibn Ṭalḥa for the honor of entering the pit of his maternal aunt (*khāla*), Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. For the quality of his ritual worship (*‘ibāa*), the man so honored had been nicknamed al-Sajjād, the Prostrator. Alongside him, two paternal nephews (grandsons of Jaḥsh) as well as a great-grandson of Jaḥsh entered her pit.[81] “Let Dhakwān [my gatekeeper] lower me into my pit and flatten [the earth] over me,” ‘Ā’isha declared as she felt death approaching, “so he will become emancipated.” In the end, a paternal nephew and two other paternal relatives (great-grandsons of ‘Ā’isha’s father, Abū Bakr), alongside two intimate acquaintances (the sons of Ibn al-Zubayr) apparently entered her grave, excluding Dhakwān.[82] Though these reports may be unreliable, the kinship relations they represent reflect social practices in the early Islamic period.

Al-Shāfi‘ī gave priority to a woman’s husband or an unmarriageable male relative (*dhū maḥram*). Were neither to be found, he would advance her slave (*raqīq*) or eunuchs (*khiṣyān*). If none of these were present, then “the one who has guardianship over her from among the Muslims” (*man waliyahā min al-muslimīn*) should manage. Finally, any pious man whom she might have approached in need and who had been entitled to see her could enter her grave.[83] Jurists who argued that “the husband’s marriage ceases with her death, whereas kinship endures” of course disagreed with al-Shāfi‘ī, ruling against the husband and in favor of the woman’s male blood-relatives. However, many jurists both Sunni and Shī‘ite concurred with al-Shāf‘ī. They held that the husband, who had been denied the right to wash his wife's corpse and to lead her funeral prayer, should be granted the prerogative to conduct this last of rites.[84]

A married woman's "rite of passage" to the otherworld involved a most complex social transition. Rites of passage, according to the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, serve in part to signify the end of a relationship as a consequence of an individual's death. They play an essential social and emotional role, by enabling widowers to become reincorporated into society and letting deceased women depart from this world and join the company of the dead.[85] Muslim discussions about the washing of corpses have revealed that many Iraqi traditionists and jurists cared little for elaborate rites of separation from their wives: they envisioned the bond of marriage as abruptly and unceremoniously broken by the mere fact of death. In their ideal world, a circle of women washes and dresses the corpse of a deceased woman without direct intervention from men. Then the women stay behind while the men transport the bier to the cemetery. Once there, the deceased woman's father, brother, or one of her prenuptial legal guardians assumes control of the funeral prayer. These men were the ones who had been entitled to give her in marriage. After the prayer, they might step back and allow the man formerly known as the husband to take charge. He would manage the insertion, a second wedding.

Thus, between the moment of death and burial, an elaborate choreography directed the corpse of a woman. It determined what social action should take place at what ritual stage. Most interesting from a political perspective is the fact that the leading role was played by a succession of actors. The hierarchy was unstable. Its configuration shifted from one ritual to another, depending on the ritual's nature. A caliph might be the most entitled man to lead the public prayer on behalf of a dead woman, but he did not have the preeminent right to handle her corpse in public, unless she had been his wife, nor of course in private. Lowering the corpse into the grave was a ritual conducted in a public setting, yet it resembled the private ritual of washing the corpse, as it required intimacy and familiarity. Therefore it was socially appropriate for a man with the right to enter the woman's private sphere to conduct this ritual. These shifts at the top of the hierarchy enabled different persons to perform key roles in the dance of death.

A Prayer for God's Slave

The funeral prayer, actually delivered before the insertion of the corpse, originated, according to Muslim tradition, only after the Migration from Mecca to Medina. It was supposedly inaugurated in honor of an early convert from Medina, As‘ad ibn Zurāra, known by the patronymic Abū Umāma.[86] This prayer consisted of several distinct utterances culminating in an intercession seeking God's forgiveness for the sins of the deceased. According to a compiler of traditions, ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 827), a famous Meccan traditionist, jurist, and exegete, claimed to have gathered forty written documents concerning "the prayer over the biers" (*al-Ṣalāt ‘ala `l-janā'iz*). Had Mujāhid (d. 722) collated these prayers in a booklet, we might have traced the origins of the "Book on Funerary Practice" to the first quarter of the eighth century. But Mujāhid retained only one of these documents. It specified that one needed first to utter God's praises, then recite the opening chapter of the Qur'ān, and finally pray for the Prophet. Then, having accomplished these three utterances, one could continue with a prayer for the deceased subject, God's slave.[87] The second step in this four-step process was controversial and sometimes omitted, as certain traditionists opposed reciting the Qur'ān in this ceremony.[88]

There were a number of different prayers for the deceased, from which an Imam could chose his favorite. Perhaps the most authoritative of these prayers was associated with Medina and its traditionist Abū Hurayra (d. ca. 678). According to Mālik, Abū Saʻīd al-Maqburī (Kaysān, d. 718) told his son Saʻīd (d. ca. 740) that Abū Hurayra would follow (the bier), alongside the family of the deceased, toward the gravesite. When the corpse was laid down on the ground, he would praise God and pray for the Prophet. Then he would intone:

> O God, he is your slave [*‘abduka*], and the son of your slave and bondmaid, who was accustomed to testify that there is no god but you, and that Muḥammad is your slave and messenger, but you are more knowing concerning him [*wa-anta a‘lamu bihi*]. O God, if he was a doer of good [*muhsin*], then increase [the preponderance] of his good deeds; and if he was a doer of evil [*musī'*], then disregard his bad actions. O God, would that you not refuse us his reward [*lā taḥrimnā ajrahu*] nor try us after him [*lā taftinnā ba‘dahu*].[89]

This prayer would be delivered "over the bier," before interment, perhaps so as to emphasize the notion that, once buried, judgment of the dead must be left to God alone.

The good deeds of God's slave: they mattered the most in the afterlife. Abū Hurayra's prayer delivered in a nutshell an egalitarian message. It made no distinction between a slave girl wrapped in tatters and a slaveowner shrouded in silk, referring to one or the other simply as “God’s slave.” Divine forgiveness, which Muslims sought through this prayer, seemed to hang by a thread: the record of a lifetime of toil in the service of God. If they listened carefully to this prayer, Muslims grew highly conscious of the transient nature of worldly inequalities. They realized, contemplating the empty grave, that death was an equalizer. Many of the social divisions that rituals of death made manifest would not abide in the hereafter. A governor who had qualified by the rules of this world to lead the funeral prayer might easily rank below a slave in the next world.[90]

Low Graves Facing Mecca

The egalitarian ideal implicit in the prayer for God’s slave seemed nowhere more effective than at the cemetery. Here would reign a powerful principle of equalization: *taswiyat al-qubūr,* the leveling of the graves. By the lights of Islamic law, all grave mounds ought to be low. Al-Shāfi‘ī remarked that the graves of the Emigrants and the Helpers were flattened (*musaṭṭaḥ*), rising barely a hand-span (*shibr*) from the ground. “I do not reckon this to be one of the affairs,” he continued, “for which anyone needs to transmit” oral traditions. The empirical evidence, in this view, seemed more reliable than conflicting traditions.[91] In this case, al-Shāfl’ī was alluding to a minor point of disagreement on the precise shape of Muḥammad’s tomb. Al-Shāfi‘ī lived in an era when access to the tomb was no longer possible. Yet he heard a report about the tomb. This report was traced to al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad (ibn Abī Bakr, d. 724), a Medinese transmitter of traditions. As ‘Ā’isha’s nephew, al-Qāsim had been granted the rare privilege of entering the entombed chamber, where his aunt lived. He observed there that the graves of Muḥammad and the first two caliphs were all level to the ground, that is, entirely flat (*musaṭṭaḥa*). By contrast, al-Bukhārī (d. 870) reported that a Kūfan pietist, Sufyān (ibn Dīnār) al-Tammār, had also seen the Prophet’s grave, and it had a convex, humped shape (*musannam*). He based himself on the authority of (Abū Ja‘far) Muḥammad ibn Muqātil (d. 844), the traveling collector of traditions from Marw, ‘Abdallāh (ibn al-Mubārak, d. 797), and the Kūfan embalmer Abū Bakr ibn ‘Ayyāsh (d. ca. 807). This distinction between the two types of graves hardly mattered, however, as one way or the other the ideal Muslim grave was to be a low earthy structure.[92]

The principle of egalitarianism was emphasized also below ground, for all corpses were to be positioned sideways in the grave, lying on the right side and facing Mecca.[93] As a result, all graves would end up uniformly lined up in neat rows in a line perpendicular to the *qibla* axis. And for the duration of this slumber between death and the resurrection, each and every Muslim would lie down facing Mecca. Were these ideals implemented, it would be impossible to distinguish the graves of men from those of women, those of the mighty from those of the poor, and those of saints from those of the rest of us.

To underscore their Islamic orientation, these tombs had a unique architectural feature: a *laḥd,* or niche, that was carved out of the side of the grave perpendicular to the *qibla* axis. It would therefore serve, like a mosque's *miḥrāb,* to indicate the Muslim direction of prayer. According to Muslim tradition, Muḥammad's own grave was built this way, by a fortuitous accident. Allegedly two gravediggers—one a Meccan emigrant, the other a native Medinese—were summoned to bury the Prophet. The Medinese happened to arrive first, perhaps by fate. (Al-'Abbās, who had sent for the two gravediggers, had prayed, "O God, choose [the right style] for God's Messenger.") The Medinese provided Muḥammad's grave with its distinctive niche, and consequently this style of digging graves became normative. The so-called Meccan style, whereby graves consisted of a plain crevice, no longer seemed optimal. In an effort to persuade Muslims to excavate graves in the "Medinese" style, traditionists would eventually associate the "Meccan" alternative with the practice of others—in particular, Jews and Christians.[94]

Alongside traditionists, jurists would insist on the desirability of burial in the "Medinese" style, yet they lacked the sanguine expectation that gravediggers would be able everywhere to recreate Muḥammad's tomb. They realized that material circumstances might prevent even the most tradition-minded gravedigger from performing the desired task. Al-Shāfi'ī, whose talent at practical reasoning in matters of law has not been properly appreciated in the history of legal hermeneutics, took into account a practical limitation. Soft, crumbling earth, he observed, could foil the best plan to dig a niche in the grave. In this case, gravediggers should begin with a plain crevice, then use stones, unfired bricks, and wood to construct a niche.[95]

The story about Muḥammad and the gravediggers may commemorate the triumph of Medinese over Meccan ways or the success of Medinese Helpers over Meccan Emigrants. Ironically, however, the so-called Medinese style actually paid homage to the Ka'ba in Mecca, the point toward which Muslims turn in their prayers. Therefore, although associated with Medina in its origins, this ritual ultimately celebrated Mecca in the sacred geography of Muslims. The ritual might have originated in Medina in 632. More likely, it emerged outside of Arabia, years after Muḥammad's death.

By burying the dead in low graves facing Mecca, Muslims promoted a sense of belonging to a single community, a community whose members, no matter where in the world they died, would all seem equal to one another—yet manifestly different from outsiders. Indeed, with or without a niche in the grave, burial in the direction of the *qibla* represented for Muslims a ritual form expressive of their own particular confessional identity. The sectarian message this orientation in burial conveyed can perhaps best be appreciated by considering the case of a deceased Christian woman impregnated by a Muslim man. Jurists argued against inhuming mother and child either in a Muslim or in a Christian cemetery. Some site in between the two would do fine. Yet her back should be turned on Mecca, so that the Muslim fetus might have more of a chance of facing in the right direction.[96]

One may discern the depth of Muslim interest in burying all Muslims with their bodies facing Mecca by considering another exceptional case, that of Muslims who died at sea. This eventuality made it next to impossible to inhume the deceased in the standard Islamic fashion. Al-Shāfiʿī, perhaps the first Muslim jurist to ponder the issue of maritime corpse disposal, recommended that the deceased be kept on board until the landing of the ship would permit interment. Alternatively, he suggested that the deceased be placed between two slabs bound with rope and dragged in tow until the sea tossed the corpse ashore, where Muslims might find and properly bury the dead. Following al-Shāfiʿī, medieval jurists worried both about the permissibility of consuming fish that had nibbled on human flesh and about the orientation of the corpse in the water. They suggested the deceased be lowered into the ocean facing the *qibla,* apparently hoping a supernatural compass would keep the corpse from steering toward perdition.[97]

In practice, on the ground as at sea, it was sometimes a challenge to bring the Islamic ideal into operation. Archaeologists have shown, as a matter of fact, that medieval Muslim corpses were not always perfectly oriented in the same way. Most variations can be easily explained away for one or another reason: disturbance of the corpse, ignorance about the precise direction of Mecca, or an idiosyncratic preference for pointing toward Mecca with the top of the head.[98] Yet the archaeological record does reveal one significant variation. A paleographie study of the early Islamic cemetery of Qasṭal al-Balqā' in Jordan contains a diagram of Muslim graves oriented in divergent directions with respect to the Jerusalem-Mecca axes. Similarly, an analysis of the burial orientation of corpses from the late medieval cemetery of Tell el-Hesi reveals a surprising anomaly. Several of the bodies were arranged, deliberately it seems, with their countenances facing not Mecca but Jerusalem.[99] This evidence suggests that the abrogation of the *qibla* of Jerusalem in favor of the *qibla* of Mecca did not have an immediate effect on burial practices everywhere in the world of Islam.[100] This variation from the norm shows that the quintessential Islamic pattern of rows of graves neatly and uniformly lined up facing the *qibla* took root gradually. Stories (to which we shall turn in the last chapter) about perverse Muslim corpses twisted by angelic forces to face away from Mecca will also hint at the difficulties pietists faced in making Muslims subscribe to a single pattern.

The Marwanid Reconstruction of Muḥammad's Sepulcher

The egalitarian ideal that pietists promoted was defied above ground as well and in a spectacular way, for Muslims who had the power and the means sometimes resolved to honor a deceased woman or man with a splendid memorial such as a domed mausoleum. This tomb structure all but announced itself as a violation of the pietist ideal in favor of low Muslim graves. It derived its significance in part by deviating from the norm. In cemeteries, where most tombs consisted of low earthy mounds, the domed mausoleum appeared as a reflection of the heavens, exalted and sublime. The wealthy, saintly, or powerful, for whom such tombs were built, were doubly honored, once by the magnificence of the monuments erected on their behalf and a second time by the willingness shown to break the sacred law in their favor. Domed mausoleums celebrated the exceptional status of the deceased, not his or her membership in the society of commoners.

Haifa century ago, an art historian portrayed the Qubbat al-Ṣulaybiyya at Samarra—an octagonal domed mausoleum erected over the grave of caliph al-Muntaṣir (r. 861–862) by his Greek mother sometime after 862—as an extraordinary first departure from early Islamic ideals. Recent scholarship has qualified this impression in several respects. It has shown, through an analysis of the literary record, that martyries and mausoleums were erected during the first and second centuries of the Islamic era. Caliphs razed some of these memorials before al-Muntaṣir's death; they targeted in particular Shīʿite shrines. Furthermore, a scholar has sensibly argued, the early Islamic interdictions against high funerary structures did not arise in a vacuum or simply in reference to pre-Islamic monuments. Rather, they were obviously directed at existing structures whose contours nevertheless remain unknown. To this evidence we must add the recent discovery of a tomb structure in an early ʿAbbasid necropolis as yet another indication of the early development of an Islamic—or from a traditionist perspective an anti-Islamic—funerary architecture.[101]

No doubt the most interesting violation of the egalitarian ideal happened in Medina and involved the reconstruction of Muḥammad's sepulcher. God’s Messenger was buried in his wife ‘Ā’isha’s bedroom, one of several rooms inhabited by the wives of Muḥammad. These dwellings were originally built of date-palm stalks, according to Muslim tradition, and reinforced with either mud or unbaked brick. They formed a humble abode. However, in 707 or thereabouts, while ‘Umar II was the governor of Medina, all of this changed. Caliph al-Walīd (r. 705–715) conceived of a grand plan to expand the mosque of Medina, which up to that date had been adjacent to the chambers of Muḥammad’s wives. These chambers were all demolished, following the caliph’s instructions, and incorporated into the enlarged mosque. Under the direction of Ṣāliḥ ibn Kaysān (d. ca. 755), a traditionist who earned a living as a foreman, Medinese workmen began to tear down the ancient buildings.

Byzantine, Coptic, or Syrian Christian craftsmen eventually joined them in this labor. Together, native Muslims and foreign Christians built a splendid mosque decorated with gold and mosaics. These mosaics were manufactured by Syrian Christians for the occasion, sent as a diplomatic gift from the Byzantine Emperor to the Umayyad caliph, or simply removed from Byzantine churches or other buildings in the “cities that had been ruined” by the Arab conquests. One way or another, Muslims would associate the mosaics of the mosque of Medina with the glory of Byzantium. The mosque, so lavishly restored, celebrated not the stark origins of Islam but its triumph as an imperial religion.[102]

The walls of ‘Ā’isha’s bedroom, where Muḥammad’s grave lay, were also razed at this time. In this context belongs the strange story of ‘Umar’s foot. It so happened that, during the caliphate of al-Walīd, according to al-Bukhārī, the wall surrounding Muhammad’s grave collapsed. Repairs were underway when, behold, someone found a foot. The people grew terrified at this discovery. But fortunately, a highly respected traditionist from Medina, ‘Urwa (ibn al-Zubayr, d. ca. 711), determined it was not the Prophet’s foot after all but the foot of one of the two caliphs who had been buried alongside Muḥammad in ‘Ā’isha’s bedroom. It is a mystery why al-Bukhārī decided to include this story, which deals with an event that happened many years after Muḥammad’s death, in his collection of sound traditions. Perhaps the purpose was to emphasize the trepidation Muslims felt around 707, when the resting spot of the Prophet was disturbed with the onset of the Marwanid reconstruction.[103]

It was indeed a controversial event. Muslim tradition holds that men shed tears on the day when al-Walīd’s edict (*kitāb*), sent from Damascus, was read in Medina. The aged Companions of the Prophet gathered to weep, and their beards, according to the Meccan traditionist ‘Imrān ibn Abī Anas, grew moist with tears. They lamented the destruction of a cultural memory and, in a sense, the end of an era. They mourned the fact that these simple, modest buildings, where Muḥammad had lived and died, would abide no longer as an example of simplicity unto Muslims. According to ‘A’ṭā al-Khurāsānī (ibn Abī Muslim, d. 752), Sa’īd ibn al-Musayyab (d. ca. 712), a Medinese jurist who had been imprisoned for his refusal to recognize al-Walīd as the legitimate caliph, cried out, “O God, would that they had left [the wives’ chambers] in their [original] state. The youth of Medina would have grown up and newcomers would have arrived from remote lands to see what [simple dwellings] had sufficed God’s Messenger. This would have served to encourage the people toward abstinence … in this world.”[104]

Though they were not wanton acts of destruction, as their end was the glorification of the past, nevertheless the demolitions provoked sharp protest. The historian al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 897) mentions that one protester, Khubayb ibn ‘Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr (d. ca. 707), rose and boldly exclaimed to the governor of Medina, “Those who call out to you from outside your chambers… .” This quotation of the first part of a Qur’ānic verse referred to the people who had unnecessarily disturbed Muḥammad in the privacy of his home. What mattered was the end of the verse, which Khubayb dared not utter, “… are most of them devoid of reason.” The implication was that the caliphate’s works of reconstruction would senselessly violate the memory of Muḥammad in his chambers. Muslims would no longer possess this heritage. Medina’s governor understood the insult, of course, and in exchange ordered for the offender a punishment of one hundred whiplashes and a treatment of cold water. It was a chilly day, and Khubayb died.[105]

In the process of reconstruction, the original adobe walls of ‘Ā’isha’s rectangular chamber were replaced by stone and surrounded by a pentagonal structure. It is unclear why the caliphate decided to cover up the original grave and build a funerary monument in its place. Nevertheless, the author of a history of Medina, Ibn Shabba (d. 875), thought there had been a good reason, revealed to him by the Medinese authority Abū Ghassan (Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn ‘Alī), for the choice of an irregular pentagonal rather than a rectangular configuration. Had the original, square design of ‘Ā’isha’s chamber been retained, pilgrims visiting the mosque of Medina would easily confuse it with the square Ka‘ba. Then, due to this mispercep-tion, they would take Muḥammad’s grave as their *qibla* and offer a ritual prayer facing in its direction.[106]

The *qibla,* to be sure, was very much on the minds of the caliph and governor who set out to expand the mosque. Al-Walīd ordered the moving of the wall nearest the *qibla* eastward, and ‘Umar II gave the mosque its first *miḥrāb,* a richly decorated prayer niche indicating the direction of prayer. By one account, this was the very first concave *miḥrāb* in the history of Islamic architecture.[107] However, Abū Ghassān's explanation for the architectural plan is not at all convincing, given that the Kaʿba was in Mecca, and there is no reason visitors to the shrine in Medina should have taken it for anything other than what it was, Muhammad's grave. Muslims actually continued to pray facing the grave even after its transformation into a pentagon. This popular desire to venerate the Prophet at his tomb would clash with the ideology of uncompromising monotheists such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). Muslims ought to pray toward Mecca, they warned. Any invocation offered, counseled the Mālikite al-Ṭurṭūshī (d. 1126) in his treatise against innovations, should be performed facing the *qibla* and with one's back turned to Muḥammad's sepulcher. In this way, there would be no confusion as to the object of prayer.[108]

Covering the burial site with stone walls and enclosing these walls with what has been called an "ungainly screen" did serve an obvious purpose: to keep visitors physically removed from the inner sanctum. Indeed, the inner walls built in the first decade of the eighth century lacked an entryway Neither a window nor a door graced the construction. The outer walls served as a second barrier. Before the works of reconstruction, the room was described as "exposed" (*ẓāhir*)—afterward, as surrounded by a "protective wall" (*ḥiẓār*) whose evident function it was to prevent everyone from approaching the grave. These barriers only served to accentuate the overwhelming sentiment that visitors to the grave inevitably experienced, that within the walls there lay the presence of the holy.[109]

Since the ninetieth year of the Hijra, when the Marwanid caliphate completed the work of reconstruction, virtually no one has been able to enter the room where Muḥammad was buried. For the briefest interval in 1481, after a fire destroyed much of the mosque and damaged the walls surrounding Muḥammad's grave, the inner sanctum was exposed. It was at this time that al-Samhūdī (d. 1506), who wrote a history of the mosque, entered ʻĀ'isha's chamber. Unfortunately, he found it so full of debris he was hardly able to ascertain the original location of Muḥammad's tomb. His visit did not help to establish even the simplest matter, about which Muslims had been uncertain since 707: precisely what the alignment of the Prophet's tomb was in relation to the tombs of the first two caliphs, who were also buried in ʻĀ'isha's bedroom. Thus, to this day, we do not know anything certain about Muḥammad's grave in its original state, before the Marwanid reconstruction.[110]

There remains one point worth making with respect to the grand memorial carried out by the caliphate of al-Walīd. This comprised the earliest major investment by the Marwanid caliphate in a building in

Arabia. It provided Medina with its first imperial monument. As such, the Mosque of Medina should count, along with the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque of Damascus, as an early and very significant landmark in the Marwanid caliphate's efforts to build up its authority as an imperial Islamic power. In modern works, historians frequently mention the monuments of Jerusalem and Damascus, but not the one of Medina. The impression that one derives from this omission is of a caliphate intent on establishing its authority in the eastern Mediterranean, while ignoring Arabia.[111] Yet in a world where power derived in large measure from proximity to Muḥammad, we must not underestimate the caliphate's drive to return to the land of the Prophet so as to establish there a landmark to commemorate its patronage of Muḥammad.

Next to the government, the pietists who resented this political attempt to gain custody over Muḥammad's grave may appear powerless. Indeed, their protests against change were disregarded, as the caliphate proceeded to transform Muḥammad's low grave into an official shrine. However, as we try to assess how power was manifested over the course of Islamic history, we should not focus exclusively on high forms such as the grand memorials erected in honor of Muḥammad and al-Muntaṣir. These imposing monuments, like the Marwanid and early ʻAbbasid shows of leadership in the funerals of notables, can only illustrate how those at the top of the hierarchy displayed their power. But low Islamic forms, like a grandson's unassuming prayer for God's slave, also demand attention. They reveal that a fundamental and striking transition was brought into operation in the name of Islam. Though in practice Muslims adopted multiple types of burial structures, archaeologists experience no trouble in recognizing Islamic cemeteries by the rows of low graves whose single occupants face Mecca. Despite individual deviations from the ideal norm, this mode of burial became common everywhere in the world of Islam. It is, moreover, a unique Muslim practice, one that Muslims do not share with Jews, Christians, and the rest of Adam's children. Sharīʻa-minded pietists protested against the Marwanid reconstruction and eventually succeeded in persuading Muslims to bury their dead according to an ideal and highly distinctive pattern. The very fact that we readily categorize any deviation from this norm as "non-Islamic" attests to their ideological triumph and hence their power.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Torture of Spirit and Corpse in the Grave

In his novel and imaginative treatises about last things, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 894) described in some detail the experiences of the dead from the moment of death to the resurrection. In edifying exhortations that took the form of oral traditions, he blurred the line between orthodoxy and popular religion. He ascribed one tradition, whose origin he located in the caliphate of‘Umar I (r. 634–644), to Tamīm al-Dārī, a Christian convert to Islam and a famous storyteller. This ascetic moralist’s tradition brings to the foreground the central themes of this chapter: the condition of spirit and corpse in the grave and the effect of death rituals on this condition during the interregnum between death and the final judgment.

The tradition opens with God giving instructions to the angel of death regarding the conveyance of a person to his grave:

> Race along, angel of death, to my friend (*walī*) … and bring him to me so that I may relieve him from the concerns of this world and its afflictions. … So the angel of death rushed to him, and with him were five hundred of the angels, [bringing] with them shrouds, and a balm [for corpses] from the balm of the Garden [*ḥanūṭ min ḥanūṭ al-janna],* and bundles of sweet-smelling basil … and white silk laced with pungent musk.

The angel of death sits by the head as all the angels surround the corpse. Each angel places a hand on “one of his limbs.” As a door to the rarities of the Garden opens, the dying person (*nafs*) finds diversion in wives, raiment, and fruit. The spirit (*rūḥ*) leaps in joy at these visions, as the angel of death entreats it with tenderness (*talaṭṭuf*) and graceful civility (*luṭf*), “Come out, good spirit, to ‘a thornless lote-tree, and a tiered acacia tree, and an extended shade, and flowing water’” (Qur’ān 56:28–31). Gently, the spirit of God’s beloved is pulled out from the body (*fa-yusallu rūḥuhu*), just as a single hair is removed from dough.

When this spirit exits the body, the angels around him say, “Peace be with you. Enter the Garden in correspondence to your works” (*udkhulū al-janna bimā kuntum ta‘malūna,* cf. Qur’ān 16:32). They redeem the beloved spirit with sweet basil during the exiting of his self (*`inda khurūj nafsihi*) and offer it repose following the exertion of death (*jahd al-mawt*). “So when the angel of death seizes his spirit [*rūḥ],* the spirit says to the body [*jasad]:* ‘May God requite you in my stead with good, for on account of me you were quick in obedience to God, sluggish in disobedience to God. So may it do you good today, as I have already made for safety and been rescued.’ And the body says to the spirit something similar.” The patches of the earth where the man used to submit to God weep for him, as does every door of heaven through which his works (*‘amal*) had ascended and his sustenance (*rizq*) descended. During the seizure of his spirit, five hundred attending angels appear by the body. Human beings cannot turn him over, despite great efforts (*lā tuqallibu-hu Banū Ādam bi-shiqq*), unless the angels turn him over before them. The angels cover him with “shrouds prior to their shroud” (*‘alat-hu bi-akfān qabla akfānihim*) and a perfume (for embalming corpses) prior to their perfume. They stand between the door of his house and the door of his grave. They seek God’s forgiveness on his behalf (*istighfār*), while Iblīs the devil screeches through the voice of his soldiers of woe (*junūduhu al-wayl*), causing a few bones of the body to crack.

Then the angel of death ascends with the spirit to heaven, where Gabriel welcomes him with good tidings. Falling down in prostration before the throne of God, the spirit rejoices as it contemplates the shade under the thornless lote-tree. But, straightaway, the angel of death places the spirit in his grave. Prayer arrives and positions itself to his right, Fasting to his left, Qur’ān and Remembrance of God at his head, Walking to Prayers at his feet, and Patience in a corner of the grave. God sends a first portion of Torture (*‘unuq min al-‘adhāb*) that approaches from the right. Prayer exclaims, “By God, his entire existence does not cease being assiduous. Rather it has been refreshed now that he has been placed in the grave.” So Torture (*‘adhāb*) tries to approach the corpse from the left side, but Fasting stands in defense. Finally, Torture begs for urgent access from a corner. He hopes to find a point of entry into the dead body, an opening unguarded by a pious act of obedience (*ṭā‘a*). Instead, he hears Patience encouraging the rest of the Works, pledging himself as an associate of the dead person and as his treasure-store during the balancing of good and evil deeds. Should the other Works lack defensive strength, Patience declares, Torture “will not prevent me from coming myself into close physical contact with” the corpse, thereby warding off attack.

Torture retreats. God sends to the grave two terrifying angels known by the names of Munkar and Nakīr. The pair bids the dead person to sit up straight in his grave, and so his shrouds fall down to his loins. They ask him, “Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your Prophet?” He delivers all the right answers. Consequently, they push back (*yadfa‘ān*) the grave, making it more spacious (*fa-yuwassi‘āni*) in all directions. Below him they dig an opening toward the Fire, and they reassure him that this is the fate from which he has been delivered. Above him they open a view toward the Garden, declaring: “This is your place [*manzil*], friend of God.” A cool breeze will waft in until God resurrects him from his grave.

What happens to God’s enemy (*‘adūw)?* Ugly angels approach the dying spirit with various instruments of punishment, including “embers from Gehenna” and burning skewers with thorns that penetrate every hair and vein. The angels strike his face and buttocks. They twist the corpse perversely as they clamor for the spirit, which they extract from the heels and the toenails. When the spirit makes its painful exit, it says to the body, “May God requite you in my stead with evil [*sharr*], for you hurried to do acts of disobedience.” The spirit is deposited in the earth; the earth curses the deceased. The grave begins to constrict God’s enemy oppressively (*ḍuyyiqa ‘alayhi qabruhu*), so that the ribs appear to quarrel with one another until the right and left sides of the ribcage collapse. When the angels ask basic doctrinal questions, the deceased answers, “I do not know” (*lā adrī*). They rejoin, “May you not know.” They strike him. Sparks fly. Above him, a door opens to the Garden. Below him, seventy-seven doors open to Hell, and a hot wind blows into his grave, to remind him that God will resurrect him in the Fire.[1]

This completes Ibn Abī al-Dunya’s tradition. Its main purpose was to encourage good works as a means of achieving a good afterlife. God’s friend is the man who prayed and fasted, accumulating the good deeds that will protect him from punishment in the grave. The tradition’s aim was not to describe the death and afterlife of an ordinary person, but rather to provide clear examples of a very good and an exceptionally bad end, the moral of which would entice or terrify imperfect human beings into adopting a more rewarding life.

In the process, it reveals something of early Muslim beliefs about the existence of angelic works that correspond in various ways to human rituals. A number of these works occur between the moment of death and burial and thus coincide with the cycle of death rites. What precisely was the relationship between one set of works and the other? At one level, the suprasensory works were considered prior to the visible works: the invisible shrouds preceded the material ones, and human hands lacked the power to turn over the corpse in order to wash or dress it (they needed the intercession of the attending angels). But at another level, the description of the angelic works obviously depended on the vocabulary of everyday rituals and on the observation of mundane objects, such as the perfume for corpses.

So far, in this book we have concentrated on the social significance of death rituals rather than on their religious or symbolic meanings. In this, the last chapter, devoted as it is to beliefs about the experiences of the dead in the grave, we shall ask: What perceived effect did these rituals have on the dead? If Muslims viewed prayers, shrouds, and the other gifts they bestowed upon the dead as efficacious, were they not bothered by the possibility that they could alter a person's fate, achieving for him in the afterlife a higher reward than that merited by his own record of faith and works? If, on the other hand, Muslims claimed that death rituals were not efficacious, arguing that the welfare of the deceased depended only on an individual's deeds and God's mercy, then how did they rationalize their services for the dead? This chapter will also focus on a set of related questions. Early Muslim stories about the way of dying and the life in the grave, in the Garden, or in the Fire dwell on the transformation of the human body. They thus reflect early Muslim conceptions of personhood.[2] During life, a person (*nafs*) was considered a composite of body (*jasad*) and spirit (*rūḥ*). How did this equation change with death? Did personal identity continue to reside in body and spirit, or did it reside in one to the exclusion of the other? What do beliefs about the afterlife show with respect to early Muslim notions of self? And, to tie this line of inquiry with the previous one, how would the society of the living affect the state of spirit and corpse in the grave?

Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's tradition described the human spirit not as if it were an intangible substance, but as if it had certain physical properties. This material quality is especially clear in the case of God's enemy, whose spirit was practically pried out of the toenails. But it is also in evidence in the case of God's friend. The simile of the hair lodged in dough, together with the image of the spirit prostrating itself before the throne, reflects a physical entity. This spirit remains in heaven only for a short while—a period of time more or less coinciding with the funeral procession—and then quickly gravitates back to the body, right on time for the burial. It will then enter the corpse and potentially dwell within it until the resurrection. A corpse thus inhabited does not appear to be inert matter, but mutable substance subject to natural putrefaction and incredible punishment. Its ability to sit up in the grave despite the pressure of the earth hints at the existence of a marvelous world ruled by laws of physics of an altogether extraordinary kind.

All these experiences of corpse and spirit occur in the interregnum known as *al-barzakh.* This is a largely unknown dimension of Islamic space-time.[3] Provisionally, we may define it as the barricade between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhira*—this world and the hereafter—and as the boundary within or beyond which dwell the spirits of the dead. For any given person, this interval corresponds to the time between death and resurrection. In the eighth century, as we shall see, this interval would become closely associated with the experiences of body and spirit in the grave.

Before turning to this early Islamic connection between *al-barzakh* and the dead person inhabiting the grave, let us step back in time to explore the Qur'ānic impressions of *al-barzakh.* We shall also examine more generally the Qur'ānic view of the relationship between bones and soul and between the living and the dead. This examination will lead to an appreciation of the double, post-Qur'ānic transformation—a shift both in the religious function of death rituals and in the mythology of the afterlife—that culminated in the fiction of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā.

The Qur'ānic al-Barzakh *Between Bones and Soul*

In the Qur'ān, the term *al-barzakh* appears three times, and its sense is of a boundary at the end of the world. In one verse, it is represented as the barrier that will remain in place until the day of resurrection, preventing the dead from returning to our world in order to accomplish good works (Qur'ān 23:99–100). The other two verses (Qur'ān 25:53, 55:19–20) envision it as a strip of land keeping the two seas from mixing with each other. God set the two seas rolling chaotically (*maraja al-baḥrayn*), but then created a forbidding partition (*barzakh wa-ḥijr maḥjūr*) to divide the salty and bitter waters (of the oceans) from the sweet and fresh waters (of rivers, lakes, and the heavens). Perhaps this *barzakh* refers to the same firmament of Genesis 1:6, by which God divided the waters of heaven from the waters below, ordering a cosmos that was originally without form and void.[4]

The Qur'ānic imagination about a boundary space between this world and the hereafter appears most developed in *Sūra* 18, which contains the dark stories of "The Cave." Essentially, the chapter consists of a series of eschatological parables that shed little light on the obscure mysteries of the Hour of Reckoning. A barrier separating the ordinary from the marvelous figures prominently in these parables. Nowhere does the term *al-barzakh* appear, but the Qur'ān (18:60) apparently evoked the dimension when it revealed that Moses traveled to the distant junction of the two seas (*majma‘ al-baḥrayn*).[5]

The first parable retells the famous story of the “seven” sleepers, who sought refuge from religious persecution in a cave. They succumbed to a long slumber in a grotto (*fajwa*), while their dog sprawled itself at the entrance to the cavern. As the years passed, God turned them to the right and the left—with the express purpose of preserving “their bodies from putrefaction,” according to Edward Gibbon.[6] Eventually, they were awakened to reveal the secret that the Hour of Reckoning (*al-sā‘a*) was surely coming. In an earlier, pre-Islamic version, the parable had hinted at the mystery of the resurrection while celebrating the triumph of Christianity. The Qur’ānic calque preserves the story as a wondrous sign of God’s ability to awaken us from the sleep of death. However, as if to compensate for the appropriation of Christian material, it introduces the story with an admonition to “those who say that God has begotten a son” and makes it clear the youths served only one God. It takes issue with the Christian count of seven sleepers, for “my Lord alone knows their number.” And it adds the dog, a striking detail missing from the Christian original. This canine guards the entrance to the cave, preventing us from entering it to glimpse at the sleepers: “Had you beheld them, you would have fled back full of dread” (Qur’ān 18:4, 18:14–5, 18:18).

The next parable tells of the otherworldly journey of Moses to the isthmus where the two seas meet (Qur’ān 18:60–82).[7] Moses vows to reach this distant strip of land “even if I march for ages.” Once he and his servant reach the place that should perhaps be identified as *al-barzakh,* they realize that the fish they had carried to relieve their hunger from the long journey had fled miraculously (*‘ajaban*), making its way by land back to the sea. On the journey back home, Moses accompanies a divine messenger and receives a lesson on theodicy. As he witnesses the divine companion sink a poor fisherman’s boat and slay a young man, Moses wonders impatiently about the absence of divine justice behind such disturbing acts. Eventually, the companion reveals to Moses there were good, though hidden, reasons at work. Once again, as in the first parable, the Qur’ān underscores the power of the Lord of the heavens and the earth at the juncture between the ordinary and the marvelous. The miraculous escape of the dead fish does not concern us here.[8] All we need to realize is that the Qur’ān rather purposely leaves the significance of the fish (and of Moses’s journey to *al-barzakh*) shrouded in obscurity, as if to hint at a dimension of reality beyond our “experiential knowledge” (*khubr,* Qur’ān 18:68).[9] Indeed, it is important to realize that scripture is often deliberately obscure. It presents parables, like those in “The Cave,” that forge a divide between believers, who must convince themselves of their clarity, and nonbelievers, who must remain, in bafflement and stupefaction, deprived of understanding. A term of foreign origin and uncertain meaning, *al-barzakh* always had a mysterious ring in Arabic.[10]

The last parable of "The Cave" relates how Dhū al-Qarnayn, whom exegetes sometimes identify with Alexander the Great, journeyed to the edge of the world. He built an iron dam (*radm*) in the valley between the Two Mountains so as to prevent Gog and Magog from ravaging the land on the other side. The legions of Armageddon have been unable to scale the dam or bore through it, but this state of affairs is temporary. In time, God will deliver on his promise (*wa'd*). He will destroy the dam and allow the waters of the apocalypse to overflow. Dhū al-Qarnayn's dam was not necessarily associated closely with the isthmus of *al-barzakh* in the Qur'ānic imagination. However, it evidently fulfilled a similar function, by acting as a physical barrier between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhira,* a barrier that would remain in effect until the Hour of Reckoning. At that time, Gog and Magog would blast through *al-barzakh,* setting in motion a chain of events that would end in the triumph of *al-ākhira* over *al-dunyā* (Qur'ān 18:83–97).[11]

This parable suggests a way to interrelate the two distinct meanings of *al-barzakh* that emerge from the explicit references to the term in the Qur'ān. One might assume that these references did not express one and the same boundary. At play might have been two distinct borderlines: the first dividing the living from the dead until the resurrection (Qur'ān 23:99–100) and the other dividing the waters of heaven from those of the earth (Qur'ān 25:53, 55:19–20). But it is not unlikely that one corresponded to the other imaginatively. Consider the apocalyptic analogy: as Gog and Magog are prevented from acting wickedly on the earth by Dhū al-Qarnayn's dam, so are the spirits of the dead prevented from operating good (or mischievous) works on earth by the barrier between the two seas, until the Trumpet sounds. On the Day of Judgment, with the sky torn asunder like a roll of parchment, the multitudes of the dead who have been dwelling in the heavens will burst out and rush like a mighty river to assemble with the living upon an earth of crumbling mountains. The dam that has locked the spirits of the dead beyond the horizon where the ocean meets the sky will finally come tumbling down.[12]

In sum, the Qur'ānic *al-barzakh* probably formed an eschatological barrier preventing the dead sleepers from returning to earth. Such a conception implies that the dead are separated from the living in the dimensions of both space and time. One envisions an encounter between both parties only at the resurrection. In the meantime, according to this interpretation, the living and the dead will occupy different worlds. There remains, however, one complication unaccounted for by this representation of the dead as unitive entities localized beyond *al-barzakh.* What was the precise relation of the dead, as beings potentially composed of body and soul, to the grand cosmic barriers? Did the macrocosmic division between this world and the next correspond to a microcosmic division between body and soul? What, in other words, was the Qur’ānic understanding of the makeup or constitution of the dead person?

The Qur’ān explains that God takes the souls (*anfus*) at the time of death much as he takes them in sleep. Yet, while he restores the souls to sleepers, he retains the souls of the dead (Qur’ān 39:42). Angels call upon the dead or dying bodies of wrongdoers and also quite possibly though less forcefully on those of believers: “Expel your souls!” (*akhrijū anfusakum,* Qur’ān 6:93).[13] Given that the body remains behind during sleep, the term *nafs* in this context cannot refer to the whole person. It should be translated, in this case, as soul. It is the disembodied soul, then, that migrates beyond the horizon of *al-barzakh,* as if in a dream, toward God.

Matters get confusing, however, when we turn to the Qur’ānic passages suggesting that personal identity resides in the bones, not in the ejected souls. “When we have died and become dust and bones [*kunnā turāban wa-‘iẓāman*], shall we be resurrected?” wondered someone (Qur’ān 56:47–48). Another incredulous man asked the Muslims (Qur’ān 36:78), “Who can give life to bones that have decayed [*ramīm*]?” Unbelievers had the fragmentation of the body in mind when they inquired how Muslims could be recreated anew “once you are torn to pieces” (*idhā muzziqtum,* Qur’ān 34:7) and become bones and “crushed pieces” (*rufāt,* Qur’ān 17:49, 17:98). By reporting such infidel discourse, the Qur’ān betrays Muslims’ own preoccupation with the prospect of the destruction of the body after death. Again and again, the Qur’ān reassures believers that God is powerful (*qadīr*) enough to bring life out of dust. He can preserve a sleeper’s body from succumbing to decomposition (Qur’ān 41:39, 2:259).[14] Infidels may assert that there is no other life but this one: “Our only life is in *al-dunyā.* We die and we live, and nothing destroys us but Time” (*al-Dahr,* Qur’ān 45:24, cf. 44:35). Believers dismiss this as so much speculation and advance the standard proofs in favor of the resurrection. Surely, a God who can revivify a lifeless land will be able to quicken the dead (Qur’ān 35:9).

So where does the essence of the person lie, in the earthbound body or in the ejected soul? More than contradictions and ambiguities, there were divergent notions of self at play Whereas infidels reduced the dead person to bones, believers envisioned the dead person as a complex entity of soul and bones. The soul, in the view of the believers, would remain outside of the corpse until the resurrection, at which time God would return it to the reconstituted bones. In this view, a fundamental separation exists between bones and soul, with one prevented from acting on earth while the other stays locked in the prison of the hereafter. Qur'ān 23:99–100, let us remember, implies that the corpse lacks an animating soul enabling it to carry out works. In the Qur'ānic understanding, then, a person (*nafs*) becomes fragmented unto death when the soul (*nafs*) leaves the body. A macrocosmic division corresponds to this break in the dead person, with the bones pertaining to this world and the soul to the hereafter.[15]

Given this separation between soul and bones, one would expect the Qur'ān to discount the significance of imaginative interactions between the living and the dead at the burial site. There, the living would find nothing but bones turning to dust. Indeed, "the living and the dead are not equal," teaches the Qur'ān. "God can make hear whomever He wills," the verse continues, "but you cannot make hear those who are in their graves" (Qur'ān 35:22). With the animating soul trapped in a different world, beyond the barrier of *al-barzakh,* what would be the point of addressing an inert corpse? It seemed pointless, furthermore, to take care of corpses after the expulsion of the soul.

Significantly, nowhere does the Qur'ān indicate how the dead body ought to be handled. It includes not a word on the washing of corpses, the funeral procession, or other ritual matters treated in this book on the basis of the *Ḥadīth.* Regarding burials, the Qur'ān reveals nothing besides that story of the raven that taught Cain how to hide the embarrassment of his brother's corpse, a story representing the origins of the ritual in anything but a positive light (Qur'ān 5:31). As for the fascinating account of *the jinn* serving the corpse of Solomon while the "creeper of the earth" (*dābbat al-arḍ*) devoured his staff, its purpose was to underline ignorance of the mysterious and the unknown (*al-ghayb*) yet otherwise natural process of putrefaction. When the corpse falls, evidently decomposed, the *jinn* realize they had worked in the service of the dead, in ignorance and shameful bondage (Qur'ān 34:14).

In the one instance where the Qur'ān addresses the rituals of prayer for the dead and of visiting the grave, it does so in a negative light. Concerning hypocrites and unbelievers, it admonishes Muslims: "Do not pray for any one of them who has died forever, and do not stand at his grave since they denied God and his Messenger, and died godlessly" (Qur'ān 9:84). In contrast, the Qur'ān says nothing about how to pray for good Muslims. Underlying this Qur'ānic devaluation of death rituals were perhaps two central notions. first, the notion that serving inanimate corpses was senseless, particularly in light of the belief in God's power to revivify dead bodies no matter how fragmented and decomposed. Second, the notion that rituals honoring the dead were in some fashion reminiscent of the worship of ancestors and the cult of the saints, pre-Islamic practices against which the Qur’ān, with its strict monotheism, reacted.[16]

In the post-Qur’ānic discourse of the *Ḥadīth,* the tenor is altogether different. To serve the dead is meritorious, a labor of religion. This discrepancy between the Qur’ān and the Oral Tradition no doubt is partly due to conventions of genre. The Qur’ān was highly selective in its choice of subject matter. Searching for transcendence and *gravitas,* it excluded from its purview incidentals of time and place, whereas, by contrast, the Oral Tradition entertained all fields of human concern, elevated or base. Yet the differences are not merely of genre but also of historical context. Whereas the Qur’ānic redactors contrived an austere monotheistic reaction to pagan rites, the proponents of the *Ḥadīth* espoused a number of popular ceremonies. If, in the first case, death rites had been depreciated or devalued, in the second, they were often sanctioned and even sacralized.

While the Qur’ān led Muslims to stretch their imaginations about the afterlife beyond that faraway partition between the two seas, it left the space of the grave largely devoid of significance. An imaginative discourse about the experiences of body and spirit in the grave developed later. As we shall see, this shift in the object of the imagination accompanied a ritual transformation and a metaphysical revolution. Soul (*nafs*), in the Qur’ānic imagination, orbited away from bones as if pulled by a divine force. In the post-Qur’ānic stories, to which we now return, the spirit (*rūḥ*) travels back to its corpse.

The Journey of the Spirit and the Sojourn in the Grave

In the post-Qur’ānic imagination, the spirit of an ordinary Muslim appeared to disengage itself from the body at the very moment of death, a moment coinciding with the seizure of the spirit by the angels. A spirit might then be transported as if in a dream to behold the seven heavens and the seven hells. In these hidden dimensions it would not sojourn but simply pass through at lightning speed in order to capture a great number of revelations, much as a bustling tourist gathers photographs of a distant world with the intention of stopping to appreciate it elsewhere. Often by the time the corpse washers were ready to prepare the body for burial, the spirit already appeared to be back in the vicinity. It would accompany the funeral procession, hovering near the corpse. Before the sealing of the corpse in its grave, the spirit might once again become embodied and remain bound to this prison until the resurrection, unless released by the power of prayer and the mercy of God.

Not all Muslims followed this journey back to the corpse. Martyrs were the notable exception, as they abandoned their mutilated bodies immediately after death and acquired new bodies in the Garden. This concept became the occasion for fantastic fictions on the metamorphosis of the body after death. This wondrous body was subject to pleasure but not to physiological changes of the kind that would render a Muslim impure and in need of ritual ablution. In Paradise, sexual performances are not interrupted by the flow of semen but remain at the peak, near the point of orgasm.[17] Certain philosophers similarly hoped they would escape the realm of rotting corpses after death if not beforehand, although their spirits, unlike those of martyrs, would soar in a sphere of immaterial delights.[18] Our concern is neither with martyrs nor with philosophers, but with the rest of Muslims, who anticipated dwelling in the grave.

The post-Qur’ānic stories have all the elements of the hero’s quest. The spirit leaves family and friends to begin a long journey. After ascending to the Throne and descending to the rock of Sijjīn, it returns back to earth, where it enters a womblike cavern for a period of tribulations. At the grave, it witnesses the feasting of worms upon its own body. Near the end, it leaves the grave behind as it strives to cross the bridge to salvation. Many spirits fail in this quest. Only the hero emerges from these trials to find himself reformed in Paradise.[19]

Let us focus here on but a short segment of this long journey: the time between death and burial, which coincides with the rituals of death.[20] According to oral traditions recorded by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, the “dead person knows who washes him” (*inna al-mayyita ya‘rifu man yaghsiluhu*) and in fact “knows everything so that he may even implore his washer, ‘Please be gentle in washing me!’” While in the hands of the angel of death, the deceased “observes how his body is washed [*yanẓuru ilā jasadihi kayfa yughsalu*], shrouded, and transported toward the grave.”[21] He listens with annoyance to the women wailing on his behalf, as their cries provoke the angels to torture the dead man.[22] If he is one of God’s friends, he entreats the pallbearers to rush toward the grave. If he is one of God’s enemies, he begs them to tarry, as if hoping to postpone the inevitable encounter with the angels in the grave.[23] finally, after the body has been delivered to the grave, “its spirit is returned to it” (*tu‘ādu ilayhi rūḥuhu*).[24]

The standard collections of *Ḥadīth* reveal far less than does Ibn Abī al-Dunyā about the experiences of the dead between the moment of death and burial. Yet they do record the Prophet on the speech of the deceased during the funerary procession. According to al-Bukhārī (d. 870), whenever the men bearing a pious person on their necks (*‘alā a‘nāq*) need to stop, the voice of the deceased encourages them to proceed quickly. If they transport a bad person, his voice laments the destination. All creatures are able to hear these voices except for human beings, who would be thunderstruck were their ears attuned to this special frequency.[25]

Why was al-Bukhārī, as a collector of “sound” traditions, more hesitant than Ibn Abī al-Dunyā to record material on the experiences of spirit and corpse before burial? One reason was of an evidentiary nature. It was not entirely clear in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā’s traditions what faculty of the spirit or what property of the corpse knows, observes, and speaks. Typically, the entity performing these acts is referred to neither as spirit (*rūḥ*) nor as body (*jasad*), but more confusingly as the dead or dying person (*mayyit*). In the Aristotelian view, souls, which require a body for actualization, perish when the body ceases to exist. (What may survive death is the intellect or rational part of the soul capable of receiving ideas or forms.) Death in this framework can be defined as occurring when the animal spirit within us ceases to activate our bodily faculties.[26] Al-Bukhārī and his informants may not have contended with Aristotelian philosophy, yet they faced difficulties justifying the belief in the animation of the organs of the corpse. Certainly we sense their discomfort in this tradition about the speech of the deceased, as they felt a need to explain it away by referring to our partial deafness.

There is another, perhaps more important reason for traditionist reticence in connection with the actions of disembodied spirits. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā’s traditions betray a popular ritualism, a belief that society interacts in magical ways with noumenal entities, affecting them but also being affected by them. Traditionists did not turn their back on such a belief. Indeed, they granted the authority of the Prophet to the stories about the speech of the deceased and the procession of angels leading the bier. Nevertheless, as if to contain an elaborate symbolism, they sanctioned only a limited number of such stories.[27] In their view, the principal religious justification for performing a ritual lay not in any magical or symbolic effects associated with the ritual, but in a simple historical fact: a ritual’s origin in the works of Muḥammad. If the Prophet had performed an action, according to Muslim tradition, this was usually enough for elevation of the action to the status of a religious ritual.[28]

At any rate, during these moments while the spirit travels toward the grave, the dead person (*mayyit*) expresses solicitude for the empty body, not for the disembodied spirit. Arguably, in this worldview, personal identity between death and burial resides primarily in the body. While philosophers concerned themselves with the survival of the intellect beyond death, ordinary Muslims concerned themselves with the survival of the corpse. How this corpse was handled between the moment of death and burial was an essential issue for the Muslims who believed in the survival of the corpse. Accordingly, the traditions that circulated about the experiences of the spirit between death and burial had in part a didactic, ritual function. Thus, for example, the story about the spirit of the deceased peering over the shoulders of a corpse washer would convince any reasonable practitioner of the art to perform duties with care. Even though implicit in this system is the attitude that the ritual is carried out for the benefit of the dead, not for the sake of the living, who would risk crossing a dead spirit?

Gravitating toward the corpse, the spirit returned quickly from its journey to the heavens to hover about the room, observing the actions of corpse handlers. It bristled at the female wailers and paraded alongside the bier. In the end, at the time of burial, did the spirit dare to reoccupy a familiar body that might soon become subject to the biological processes of change and corruption? As a matter of fact, the "reunion of the body with the spirit in the tomb" became, for infidels and ordinary Muslim sinners alike, a reality (*ḥaqq*) upheld by dogma.[29]

Of course, no one was all that clear about the precise nature of this connection between spirit and corpse in the grave. Eventually, in late medieval times, some Muslims speculated that the spirit lodged itself in the interstice between corpse and shroud. Others imagined it as a smoky substance concentrated in the upper part of the body. One gets the impression most Muslims were not much preoccupied by the how and the why of it, but believed the spirit would become embodied as it had been in this life.[30] How, otherwise, would the corpse possess the ability to sit up, answer questions, hear, comprehend, scream, and tell stories? The deceased, in the traditionist worldview, was even able to feel bodily pain.[31]

Perhaps the drastic shift in tone can most easily be appreciated by comparing the Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth* on the hearing of the dead. As noted above, the Qur'ān (35:22) had declared that "you cannot make hear those who are in their graves."[32] By contrast, an oral tradition holds that the dead person "hears the tapping of the sandals" of living men at the moment they leave the gravesite, when the angels arrive and the corpse sits up for their questions.[33] Supposedly, according to a tradition, when somebody challenged Muḥammad for addressing dead people, he replied, "You do not hear better than they do, though they cannot reply."[34] A tradition ascribed to 'Ā'isha makes it clear that early Muslims were as aware as we are of the contradiction or discontinuity between the Qur'ānic and the post-Qur'ānic statements on the hearing faculties of the dead.[35] A shift in the vocabulary used for describing the dead person marks this transformation. The Qur'ān had referred to what we might call the dead person in terms of bones (*'iẓām*) and soul (*nafs*) as a fractured entity. These terms lose importance in the post-

Qur'ānic material, where the dead person emerges as a whole being (*mayyit*) composed of spirit (*rūḥ*) and body (*jasad*). The return of spirit to corpse has implications in the sphere of dogmatic theology. At a more fundamental level, however, we should see the return of the spirit as reflective of a transformation in the very sense of personal identity. Whereas in the Qur'ānic system, the self becomes fragmented at the moment of death, in the post-Qur'ānic system, personal identity continues to reside in the body beyond death until the resurrection, at which time finally a metamorphosis will take place rendering the dead body incorruptible.

Once quickened by its spirit, the corpse returned, not quite to life, but certainly to a semblance of life. This fact is emphasized in a "secret" tradition that caliph 'Umar II (r. 717–720) supposedly disclosed to Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab (d. 720), when they were bathing together in the *ḥammām.* The tradition concerns the state after death of the caliph who had commissioned the rebuilding of Muḥammad's tomb chamber. 'Umar II revealed:

> I descended into the grave of al-Walīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik [d. 715] on the occasion [of his burial]. When we took him [out] of his bedstead [*sarīr],* [which served as a bier], and held him in our hands, he was in a state of commotion within his shrouds. So we deposited him in the grave. His son cried out, "My father is alive! My father is alive!" So I said to him, "Your father is not alive, but they [that is, the dead] encounter this [fate] in their graves."

The tradition served, of course, a political purpose: to show what comeuppance befell a Marwanid caliph whose policies caused a great deal of resentment in the eastern lands of the caliphate.[36] At the same time, it revealed the secret that the dead can grow agitated in the grave.

The first event that befell a corpse animated with the sense of hearing took place immediately after burial, once the congregation of the living tapped their feet on the ground, issuing a percussive sound.[37] Angels, often identified by the names of Munkar and Nakīr, conducted this event, known as "the inquisition in the grave" (*fitnat al-qabr*). Black or bluish, with long, wild, curly hair, lightning eyes, frighteningly large molars, and glowing iron staffs, these angels would ask a number of questions about points of dogma. All of these questions were reasonably easy to answer, their aim being neither to delve into abstruse points of theology nor to ponder articles of belief, but quite simply to determine confessional affiliation.[38] The angels would inquire, for instance: "What were you accustomed to say about that man who had been in your midst and is known by the name of Muḥammad?” “I confess that he is God’s slave and his messenger,” the dead person answers confidently, succinctly.[39] Shīʿites claimed the angels also asked the dead person about “the Imam of his time” and about the Prophet’s family, the *ahl al-bayt,* but Sunnis envisioned no confessional questions of this kind.[40]

In order to answer any query in front of these terrifying angels, the dead needed their wits. Most medieval authorities agreed on the fact that spirit (*rūḥ*) and mind (*ʿaql*)—as well as possibly the faculty of rational speech (*manṭiq*)—dwelled in the corpse at least for the duration of the trial.[41] Hardly anyone vacillated on the dogma of the return of the spirit to the corpse. If anything was the subject of obfuscation, it was the duration of the sojourn. When, how, and why did spirit and mind finally exit the tomb? If a spirit had passed the angels’ exam or been purged of sin, could it fly away from the body, never to return, and join the bird-martyrs in the Garden? Some Muslims thought so.[42] Yet most believed that even impeccable spirits remained in the grave until the resurrection, though not suffering after the fashion of the wicked.

With the angelic inquisition over, life in the grave lapsed into a certain rhythm. Day changed to night above ground, but this fact hardly mattered to those who lived below ground in the perpetual “darkness of the grave” (*ẓulmat al-qabr*). Several times a day, the grave would address its denizen, gloating about the industrious worms, the unbearable loneliness captivating the dead, and the relentless pressure of earth upon crumbling bones (*ḍaghṭat al-qabr*).[43] Such realistic punishments, imitating or representing the natural processes of bodily decomposition and fragmentation, mixed with deliberately fictionalized tortures.[44] Early Muslims regarded fire as a divine agent of punishment not to be used in conventional warfare. They held that from time to time, a purgatorial or retributive fire (*nār*) filled the grave of sinners and infidels. All of these punishments, which punctuated the existence of spirit and corpse in the tomb, were part of *ʿadhāb al-qabr,* “the torture of the grave.”[45]

Twice a day, the grave would transform itself into a parterre and the deceased would become a spectator of scenes to come in Paradise or Hell. Revealed to the inhabitant of the grave, early in the morning and again in evening, was his or her (eventual) resting place (*maqʿad*) amongst the inhabitants of the fire or of the Garden. There he would be placed, but not until the Resurrection.[46] In some minds, the play of “Hell” appeared populated mostly by women, many of whom had been ungrateful to their husbands. A cast of questionable characters accompanied these women. It included the hoarder of wealth (tortured in the nipples by a burning stone), the adulteress (baking naked in a furnace), the liar (an iron hook pierces his cheek again and again), the man who knowingly rejected the Qur’ān (a stone relentlessly crushes his head), and the usurer (swimming in a river of blood).[47] By contrast, during the play of “Paradise,” reclining men, black-eyed houris of translucent bones, and prepubescent slave boys occupied the stage. They were accompanied by replicas of God’s tame creatures—sheep, camels, and horses, rather than monkeys, pigs, and scorpions.[48] Rarely were women cast as characters in this play The one woman who appeared on occasion to play the character of the good wife was confined to her palace, secluded and veiled. She presented herself full of desire for a husband whose lovemaking was always interrupted by climactic calls from God.[49] This play was not staged for the amusement of all women, but they could do relatively little to alter the scenes. Mystics alone possessed the imaginative faculties to envision from the grave a different kind of Paradise, a place where male houris would chase delighted old hags and where distinctions of sex would disappear in selfless union with the fire of God.[50]

Islam, a scholar has argued, is “probably the most uncompromising of the world’s religions in its insistence on the equality of all believers before God. In God’s eyes, differences of rank and affluence are irrelevant, and all Muslims regardless of their positions in this world are equally capable of salvation in the next.” Refined ideas about the ideal stratification of society developed outside of the Islamic tradition, according to this argument, primarily through the Muslim reception of an Iranian dystopia. Gradually, this egalitarian ideal was stripped of its significance in an intellectual exercise culminating in the division of society into four estates: men of the pen, men of the sword, men of the market, and men of the earth. This summary cannot do justice to a searching essay that reveals many aspects of Islamic social thought.[51]

This view of Islam is problematic, however, because it emphasizes social divisions on the basis of relations of production among classes of men, neglecting other forms of social differentiation. By arguing that the early Islamic tradition was predominantly “egalitarian,” it turns a blind eye to patriarchal ideals. Differences of sex preoccupied traditionists—and mattered in the economy of salvation. With its slave boys, houris, and reclining men, the ideal society of the Garden of Eden was anything but an egalitarian fantasy. Consider the following oral tradition, ascribed to the Baṣran traditionist Abū Rajā’ ‘Imrān (d. ca. 726): “I beheld the Garden and observed that most of its inhabitants were paupers. Then I beheld the fire and observed that most of its inhabitants were women.”[52] A wealthy woman might, if extraordinarily virtuous, ascend to the Garden, but her rank in this world made it more difficult for her to gain salvation than for a male pauper. Clearly, some Muslims were more equal than others.

During life, the previews of the plays of “Paradise” and “Hell” served to admonish those living in sin to repent and to begin living the virtuous life. But in death, during the sojourn in the grave, the function of the plays was different—retributive, perhaps, for the dead lacked the power to mend their ways. They were incapable of transforming knowledge into action. Indeed, they were sometimes heard complaining of the fact that they possessed an intellect (*‘aql*) capable of perceiving secrets that had been veiled from them during life, yet lacked the capacity to activate their body in order to perform good works.[53] If the living lacked knowledge, the dead lacked power. Such was life in the theater of the grave. The repertory was limited, and one was more or less bound to stay in place.

Purgation or Retribution in the Grave

In the Qur’ānic worldview, the distant barrier between this world and the hereafter kept bones and soul apart. In the post-Qur’ānic worldview, after its brief tour of the cosmos, the spirit of the deceased gravitated toward the corpse. This change in the location of the spirit would coincide with a change in the location of *al-barzakh.* Space became compressed and time collapsed, so that the distance between grave and *al-barzakh* grew considerably narrower. An examination of this fundamental shift in the referent of *al-barzakh* will lead us directly to a discussion concerning the traditionist dogma of *‘adhāb al-qabr,* “the torture of the grave.” To gain a clearer understanding of the meaning and purpose of this form of torture, certain Jewish, Christian, and Muslim notions of punishment after death will be compared.

In a dissertation on life between death and the resurrection, a scholar showed that *al-barzakh* initially appeared as the antechamber of *al-ākhira,* in a dualistic frame of mind that had posited a sharp division between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhira,* without much regard for a middle term. Eventually, it acquired a status of its own, one not entirely independent from *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhira,* yet of comparable stature. As *al-barzakh* came to occupy the middle ground, the world system succumbed to the tripartite scheme of *al-dunyā–al-barzakh–al-ākhira.* Thus a liminal gateway to the hereafter gradually expanded into a halfway house between life on earth and salvation. In this scholar’s view, “the *barzakh* speculation completed its course smoothly and quietly, being from the outset a genuine Islamic product, a rare phenomenon in the eschatological market.”[54] There was nothing smooth, however, in the transition from the Qur’ānic to the post-Qur’ānic eschatological landscape. The level of historical discontinuity can be appreciated in part by noticing how varied were traditionist and exegetical approaches to *al-barzakh.*

Glossing the term, some exegetes located *al-barzakh* on the map, in that strip of land separating the Persian Gulf from the Mediterranean Sea. In mind perhaps they had Mesopotamia, the land dividing the salty waters of the oceans from the sweet waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.[55] This was one of several different early Islamic interpretations of the Qur'ānic term. In a conversation recorded in a Shī'ite compilation of tradition, Abū 'Abdallāh (Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, d. 765) affirms that, thanks to the intercession (*shafā'a*) of the Prophet or of his agent, 'Alī, "all of the Shī'ites" (*kullu shī'atinā*) will enter the Garden after the resurrection. However, he continues, "I am filled with dread for you in *al-barzakh."* "And what is *al-barzakh*?" 'Amr ibn Yazīd asks him. "It is the grave [*al-qabr*] from the time of his death to the day of the resurrection," responds the master.[56] His reply is stunning, as it brings the junction between this world and the hereafter to the grave. To reach this destination, one would not have to journey, as Moses had, to the horizon where heaven meets sea and wondrous things happen to dead fish. One would merely need to walk to the edge of the city, if the cemetery was located at the gates.

Exegetes began to associate the boundary space of *al-barzakh* with cemeteries or grave clusters early on in the history of Islam. The exegesis of the Qur'ān attributed to Mujāhid of Mecca (d. ca. 722) quotes al-Ḥasan of Baṣra (d. 728) defining *al-barzakh* as "those graves that stand between you and the hereafter" (*al-barzakh hiya hādhihi `l-qubūr allatī baynakum wa-bayna `l-ākhira*). Mujāhid himself continued to regard *al-barzakh* more or less in the Qur'ānic mode, as a barricade preventing the dead from returning to this world (*al-ḥājiz bayna `l-mawt wa `l-rujū;' ilā al-dunyā*).[57] However, in the mind of his Iraqi contemporary al-Ḥasan, *al-barzakh* no longer functioned as it did in the archaic Qur'ānic imagination. Dreamy visions of a Prophet visiting an apocalyptic dam locking the spirits of the dead beyond the mysterious junction of the two seas gave way to an altogether different scene. What we must envision now are ordinary men and women visiting the cemetery, treading upon this ground, and imagining the corpses of family and friends activated below. In this cemetery, the living and the dead were separated by only the flimsiest of barricades.

The great leap in Muslim visions of the afterlife happened when the Qur'ānic boundary to the other world was identified with the graves of this world. This event in the history of Qur'ānic interpretation took place as early as the first quarter of the eighth century, in Baṣra, if its ascription to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is correct. At any rate, once the interpretation took hold, *al-barzakh* began to evolve from a boundary line to a boundary space. Its location in the between-and-betwixt space separating this world and the hereafter only aided the imagination in producing a creative mixture of fiction and reality. The graves formed part of the landscape of this world, yet the dead inhabiting these graves were ruled by the laws of another world. The notion that near or within every city, at the cemetery, there existed a society of dead human beings who suffered in an unearthly way was as powerful as it was productive.

Perhaps on account of uncertainty about the meaning of *al-barzakh,* Sunni collectors of Oral Tradition shunned the mysterious term.[58] They did, of course, deal with the images portraying life between death and the resurrection, but with reference to “the grave,” which they defined as “the first of the way-stations to the hereafter” (*al-qabr awwal manāzil al-ākhira*).[59] It is as if in their view the term *al-barzakh* did not convey with full force their belief in the interregnum of the grave. It seems, moreover, that Sunni traditionists felt uncomfortable with the novel interpretation of *al-barzakh* as an independent dimension of space-time. They preferred to continue viewing the world as it had been represented in the Qur’ān, in dualistic terms.[60] Even so, traditionists were swept up by the same winds of change that assailed the exegetes who defined *al-barzakh* with reference to the grave. One can easily sense this change in their reconceptualization of the Qur’ānic notion of punishment after death. The Qur’ān had designated this punishment by the term *‘adhāb,* or torture, without specifying where this punishment might take place. By contrast, in the post-Qur’ānic imagination of the traditionists, there was no ambiguity about locating this punishment in the common grave. The most authoritative collection of Sunni traditions, by al-Bukhārī, glossed the Qur’ānic *‘adhāb* specifically as *‘adhāb al-qabr,* “the torture of the grave.”[61]

This concept of punishment in the tomb emerged in the Islamic milieu no later than the first quarter of the eighth century, as can be established on the basis of outside evidence. In a satirical poem, its barbs directed against al-Farazdaq, Jarīr (d. ca. 728) provoked, “You were aggrieved as is the man punished in his grave” (*ghumimta kamā ghumma `l-mu‘adhdhabu fi `l-qabr*).[62] References to this form of torture can also be easily found in early works. The collection of traditions attributed to the Ibāḍi Khārijite al-Rabī‘ ibn Ḥabīb (d. ca. 790), the *Muwaṭṭa’* of Mālik (d. 795), and the *Muṣannaf* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 827) mention it.[63] Early in the history of Islam, traditionists elevated their belief in the punishment of the tomb to the status of dogma. The creedal statements associated with Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) consigned to perdition the followers of the heretic Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 746), who dared “not to know” this article of faith.[64] Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) exclaimed that if traditionist reports (*akhbār*) concerning Muḥammad’s prayers to be spared the punishment of the tomb were false, then none of “our religious decrees” and none of “the reports about our Prophet” were sound.[65]

Defending the orthodox position, al-Ashʿarī (d. 935) would denounce Muʿtazilite theologians and Khārijite sectarians for denying the reality of the punishment in the tomb.[66] His defense was hardly necessary. In the early Islamic period, a few skeptics, among whom figured most prominently Ḍirār ibn ʿAmr (d. ca. 815) and Bishr al-Marīsī (d. 833), had reportedly questioned the notion that the dead endured tortures in their graves. Half a century later, however, the skeptics had been cowed, as is evident from the endeavor of the Muʿtazilite al-Shaḥḥām (d. ca. 875) to dissociate Muʿtazilism from Ḍirār ibn ʿAmr's denial of the punishment of the grave. This disavowal of an earlier Muʿtazilite position suggests that the traditionist dogma had emerged triumphant before al-Ashʿarī's time, around the middle of the ninth century.[67]

Despite their insistence on making the punishment of the grave part of Muslim orthodoxy, traditionists changed their minds about the punishment's religious function. An archaic tradition reveals that early on in Islamic history, some traditionists had thought that wailing for the dead brought about grave tortures. This tradition became controversial, however, once other traditionists came to realize that it was morally problematic to hold that God would punish an individual in his grave on account of the sins of wailers. They contended that God would mete out tortures only in relation to an individual's own record of a lifetime of faith and works.[68]

But what was the purpose of these tortures? To punish infidels bound for hell or to purge believers bound for heaven? Were the tortures essentially retributive or purgatorial? Both the good and the bad experienced grave oppression, but the intensity and frequency of the punishment depended teleologically on the destiny of the dead person.[69] For lucky corpses deserving the Garden, life in the grave was not all that wretched, and may be envisioned as taking place in some sort of "charmed limbo" (*barzakh maḥmūd*).[70] Unlucky corpses, by contrast, were "tortured after death in *al-barzakh.*"[71] The stark distinction between one and the other fate can best be appreciated with reference to the tradition Ibn Abī al-Dunyā ascribed to Tamīm al-Dārī: God's friend lives comfortably in an expansive space, while God's enemy suffers claustrophobic constriction.

Muslim traditions granted a suspension from the inquisition of the grave to various categories of Muslims. Prophets were granted a reprieve because "God forbade the earth from eating away the bodies of the Prophets."[71] Martyrs, as well as those who earned the status of martyr due to their physical suffering in the moments before death, were also granted an exemption. "He who dies sick dies a martyr," affirmed an oral tradition, "and is protected from the trial of the grave, and is brought sustenance from the Garden in the morning and in the evening.[73] Similarly, Muslims who had spent every night reading *Sūrat al-Mulk* (Qur’ān 67) bypassed the inquisition. Having feared God’s sovereignty, his wrath, fire, and woeful scourge—the principal themes of the *Sūra*—and having persevered night after night in this activity even as their eyes grew dim and weary, they had already endured the necessary hours of darkness.[74]

A grave robber (*nabbāsh*) declared on his deathbed, “I have never done a good deed” (*lam aʿmal khayran qaṭṭu*). Despairing of life, he asked his family to burn away his flesh on a pyre, to crush his bones into a fine powder, and to scatter them over the sea on a windy day. They fulfilled his death wishes. Having defied the Muslim way of burial, this man was forgiven by God, who collected his particles.[75] Why did God forgive such a man? Evidently because the man had feared divine punishment more intensely than self-annihilation and because, by subjecting his corpse to the fire, the man fulfilled the requisite bodily suffering leading to salvation. Abū Dā’ūd ’s “Book on Funerary Practices” opens with a chapter entitled “Diseases That Grant a Remission of Sins.” In the first tradition of this chapter, Muḥammad says: “Whenever an illness afflicts the believer and God cures him, it [works] as an expiation [*kaffāra*] for his previous sins, and as an admonition against future [sins].” In the next tradition, Muḥammad explains that when a slave fails by means of works (*ʿamal*) to reach the high religious rank (*manzila*) God had anticipated he would attain, God afflicts his body, his property, or his child. It is by means of such tribulations that the believer advances toward a higher station. To suffer the death of a child was considered a most dire trial, as a result of which the bereft parents would be shielded from entering the fire after their deaths.[76]

The punishment of the grave apparently served a purgative function for Muslim sinners whose bodies had not been absolved otherwise—by disease, nightly recitation, or self-imposed mutilation. Punishment was meted out for all manner of peccadilloes, and everyone feared it. Even the prophet Muḥammad had prayed frequently for forgiveness and hoped for indemnity.[77] Such sins as slandering others and soiling oneself with urine brought about purgatorial tortures. “You prayed one day in a state of impurity” (*ṣallayta yawman wa-anta ʿala ghayr wuḍū*), the angels explain to a dead spirit who wonders why his skin is the subject of flogging.[78] A man from Medina who had undertaken the burial of his sister forgets a worldly good (*matāʿ*) in her grave. He exhumes her body in order to retrieve his possession, but gets curious about her condition. So he peers into the niche (*laḥd*) of the grave and discovers it ablaze with fire. Returning to his mother’s home, he inquires about his sister’s behavior. The mother confesses that his sister used to be late for prayer, suspected that she had not carried out the minor ritual ablution before prayer, and knew that she used to eavesdrop on her neighbors and spread their household secrets.[79]

Muslims also expected tortures for faults in their dogmatic formation. A central purpose of the angels’ trial was formally to distinguish the sincere Muslim (*Ṣāliḥ*) from the Muslim hypocrite (*munāfiq*), who had practiced Islam outwardly but concealed suspicions and misgivings inwardly, and from the Muslim skeptic (*murtāb*), who had entertained doubts and disturbed the peace of others. To weed out opportunistic Muslims, the angels would punish the deceased even after he or she had given the correct, formulaic answers to their questions. Muslims with a depth of faith would adhere steadfastly to their beliefs, whether punished for them or not, whereas hypocrites would easily relent, declare their ignorance, and suffer for it in the grave. It was not so easy to bluff one’s way into a comfortable afterlife. As for infidels, they were, unlike hypocrites, clear minded in their lack of belief. For this reason, theologians were not convinced that infidels would be questioned in the grave.[80]

But salvation was not attained by faith alone. Certainly, the principal cause of punishment in the grave was, for Muslims, an imperfect tally of their own works (*‘amal*). Thus, according to a tradition in the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal, Muḥammad mentioned that a man was “tortured in his grave due to his works.”[81] One story served to admonish Muslims about the connection between wicked deeds and grave tortures. It tells of the conversion of a *nabbāsh,* or grave robber. Historians may feel sympathy for labor that, though defiling and consuming, had the aim of exposing treasures locked in the grave and the side benefit of communion with the dead. Herodotus, after all, nearly crossed the line from historian to exhumer of corpses when he pelted the skulls of Persians lying dead on the battlefield—in order to verify a marvelous Egyptian report about their brittleness. But Muḥammad cursed the profession of grave robber.[82] In the story, a man who had been intent on despoiling the dead of their burial shrouds had a change of heart. He exhumed a grave and saw the corpse of a man transfixed by nails, with the face contorted away from the *qibla.* So he recoiled, fearful of what might come to pass to his own corpse were he to persist in this strange occupation.[83]

The moral system emerges in stark relief in the key tradition of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā with which this chapter opened. Torture can attack the corpse of God’s friend successfully only if Works, Prayer, Fasting, Jihād, and such other personified acts of individual religious accomplishment fail in their defensive role.[84] A body would become vulnerable to attack if, for example, a Muslim had neglected during the course of life to pray after observing the regimen of ritual hygiene. Conversely, had he performed properly such rituals as *wuḍū’,* the minor ritual ablution, he would have built up the immune system to guard against bacterial decomposition. Yet we must understand that, when Works yield to Torture, not all is doomed, for the receipt of torture may well lead to divine forgiveness.

This hope was based on the optimistic belief that God might ultimately forgive Muslims who had committed grave or venial sins. Heretics and sectarians, in the orthodox understanding, failed to appreciate God's ability to balance in a most delicate and mysterious way the weights of reward and punishment. With an unforgiving logic, they argued that a major sin for which a so-called Muslim failed to repent before death would perforce lead to eternal damnation. Muslims who opposed this view held, instead, that God would not necessarily consign Muslim sinners to an everlasting, painful torment. A sinner's good deeds, the Prophet's intercession on his behalf, and God's mercy could all conspire to free Muslims from such a fate.[85]

The punishment of the grave had a role to play in this scheme. In the Ash'arite understanding, the torture of the grave served the Muslim sinner as a means of purification (*taṭhīr*) and expiation (*takfīr*).[86] Similarly, a late medieval collection of traditions on the Garden and the fire explains:

> Believers and the spirits who have debts and wrongs [*duyūn wa-maẓālim*] pending will not be able to reach the Garden nor Heaven until their debts and wrongs are settled. As for the spirits of Muslims who were confirmed in sinfulness, these will be tortured in the grave alongside the body. As for the spirits of infidels and hypocrites, these [are tortured] in the prison of the fire of Gehenna.[87]

A Muslim sinner, then, might be promoted to heaven, but not before gaining freedom from debts and sins. The tortures of the grave worked as a purgative drug. Hence, *'adhāb al-qabr,* insofar as it referred to the punishment of a Muslim sinner, should be translated as "the purgatorial torture of the grave." Correspondingly, *al-barzakh,* insofar as it referred to a Muslim sinner's sojourn in the grave between death and the resurrection, should be translated as "the Muslim Purgatory."[88] In this respect, *al-barzakh* operated as the boundary space where "perfect but impure souls" (*nufūs kāmila ghayr munazzaha*) dwelled. These souls were, in the Neoplatonic understanding of Avicenna (d. 1037), incapable of experiencing absolute happiness. Weighed down by a desire for the corporeal, they had failed to follow the divine cult (*al-'ibāda al-ilāhiyya*) and the sacred, prophetic law (*al-sharī'a al-nabawiyya*). To merit the ascension to the highest, blissful state, they would need to suffer grievously after death. *Al-barzakh* served as the setting for their purgation.[89]

Reservations may be entertained about translating *al-barzakh* as Purgatory. In the medieval Christian economy, only the shades of Christians destined for salvation would enter Purgatory, and all would gradually earn the ascension to Paradise. The tortures of *al-barzakh,* by contrast, were predicated upon a keen sense of retributive justice and did not necessarily guarantee salvation. In some cases, they provided a foretaste of Hell rather than a painful but assured ascent toward Heaven. Indeed, one might emerge from the grave without absolution. The trials, in any case, would continue beyond the grave, at the time that trembling Muslims would endeavor to cross the razor-sharp bridge of Ṣirāṭ. to make it to the other side.

The Muslim tortures of the grave also differed in several respects from the early Christian "purgatorial punishments" (*poenae purgatoriae*).[90] Early Christians apparently did not associate punishments in the afterlife closely with any specific place, as Purgatory had yet to be born. In the Christian imagination, a place for purgation developed only by the late twelfth century, according to Jacques Le Goff, when Christians first began to use the noun *Purgatorium.*[91] By contrast, Muslims already in the first quarter of the eighth century had located the place of punishment in the grave, perceiving the object of punishment as the animated corpse itself. One may sense, in the early Islamic association of *al-barzakh* with the punishment of Muslim sinners in the grave, the birth pangs of Purgatory.[92] In the West, Christians would eventually locate Purgatory in Sicily or some other place between Heaven and Hell, but not in the grave.

This difference in the location of the Muslim and Western Christian purgatories was predicated, in turn, on a significant difference between Muslim and Christian anthropology. In the post-Qur'ānic Muslim view, the deceased person's spirit was closely, almost inextricably, bound to the corpse. In Christian anthropology, by contrast, soul and body were sharply divided. Death was for Christians the moment of the soul's liberation from the body. Beginning with Origen (d. ca. 254), Christians rejected as heretical the doctrine of the "Arabian" church that human souls die, become corrupted, and dissolve alongside the corpse.[93] To think that the soul, which had suffered during life in the prison of the body, might continue to live after death in a tortured corpse was to them inconceivable.

Even the fourth-century Syriac writer Aphraates, known as the Persian Sage, dared not contemplate such an end. Aphraates did advance the mysterious and controversial idea that a "soulish spirit" was buried with the human corpse. His anthropology was based not on any metaphysical dualism but on a trichotomous view of the Christian as a man or woman composed of body, animating spirit, and holy spirit. This last part, the immortal holy spirit, becomes part of a woman or a man only with the second birth of baptism; it returns to Christ at the moment of death. The soulish or animating spirit, by contrast, remains with the body after death. Hence Aphraates' teaching may seem close to the traditionist Muslim view, defending the dogma of the return of the spirit to the corpse. The essential distinction, however, is that for Aphraates, the buried spirit is "deprived of sensation." During "the sleep of the soul," it might experience unpleasant dreams, yet these psychic tortures pale in comparison to the physical punishments that Muslim sinners were forced to undergo in their sentient corpses.[94] Still, beginning perhaps with the Nestorian Bābay the Great (d. 515), Eastern Christians held that souls between death and the resurrection must wait in a state they also designated by the term *al-barzakh.* This intervening state was not a restful limbo for everyone, despite the impression of the Mu'tazilite theologian 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025) that Nestorians did not believe in the "torture of the afterlife" (*'adhāb al-ākhira*). In fact, in the Nestorian view, a stubborn person who had abandoned the truth after having known it would be temporarily afflicted after death with "distress" (*ghamm*).[95]

Muslim notions about the experiences of the deceased person between death and the resurrection are even closer to Jewish than to Eastern Christian notions, and it is possible that certain aspects of the Muslim understanding emerged under the influence of Judaism. According to one oral tradition, Muḥammad's wife 'Ā'isha first heard of the punishment in the grave when a Jewish woman taunted her, "May God protect you from the punishment in the grave." 'Ā'isha asked the Prophet about it. Afterward, she noticed him seeking refuge with God from such torture in every prayer (*ṣalāt*).[96] Muḥammad himself learned of the dark trial in the grave thanks not to a Jewish informant but to a divine revelation he received during an eclipse of the sun. As a result, traditionists advised Muslims to seek refuge with God from the punishment of the grave during solar eclipses.[97]

The Jewish notion of *ḥibbuṭ ha-qever* ("the beating of the grave") is rather similar to *'adhāb al-qabr,* but it apparently developed only in Islamic times and perhaps under Muslim influence. Nevertheless, before the rise of Islam, the rabbis did elaborate certain ideas about the suffering of corpses in the grave. Thus, in the tractate Sanhedrin, the Babylonian Talmud refers to *ṣa'ara de-qivra,* "the pain of the grave" closely tied to the decomposition of flesh. In the tractate Shabbat, Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel remarks that "the flesh of the dead does not feel the scalpel." Yet Rav Yiṣḥaq remonstrates that the dead do feel pain, for "worms are as painful to the dead as a needle in the flesh of the living.”[98] These references show that at least some of the rabbis believed in the tormented “life” of the dead in the grave. Interestingly, however, they did not claim that these punishments were due to wailing for the dead, sins, a lack of good works, or an incorrect faith. The punishments Rav Yiṣḥaq envisaged would affect all the dead, regardless of moral makeup, merely by virtue of the sentience of the corpse. Thus it seems that instead of merely borrowing, Muslim traditionists transformed the Jewish notion of *Ṣa‘ara de-qivra.* For them, the decay of corpses was not a biological fact determined by the laws of natural physics. It was a religious event governed by ethical rules. Pure, faultless Muslims did not suffer in the grave beyond the initial, frightening inquisition of the angels; only sinners and infidels experienced pain beyond this trial, and their suffering continued in proportion to their crime. Hence, the torture of the grave presented traditionists with an opportunity to moralize about the consequences of right and wrong action.

The question of influence or originality aside, it appears that the general concept presented an occasion for Judeo-Muslim polemic. The Jews would provoke Muslims: “We shall enter [into the fire] for a short while, then you will replace us.” In exchange, Muslims claimed Muḥammad had heard, while sauntering in a graveyard after sunset, the dreadful voices of Jews being punished in their graves.[99] The punishment in the grave served not only to purge Muslim sinners, remiss in the practice of good works, but also to torture non-Muslims, who were, by definition, imperfect in their faith.

The Efficaciousness of Rituals and the Afterlife

The deceased person, in the Qur’ānic understanding, was sharply divided in accordance with a dualistic macrocosmic model: its bones remained on earth while its soul dwelled beyond *al-barzakh,* the distant borderline between this world and the hereafter. There was no sense in trying to communicate with bones. By contrast, in the post-Qur’ānic system, the corpse and its spirit would dwell jointly, between death and the resurrection, in *al-barzakh.* In this context, *al-barzakh* referred to actual graves, “way-stations of the hereafter,” in a macrocosm making the transition toward tripartite division. As they became animated in the grave, corpses gained the ability to hear sounds such as the drumming of sandals on the tomb.

This raises an intriguing possibility: the spirited corpse might easily find itself affected by the behavior and ritual activities of the men and women visiting the cemetery.[100] In what ways did the community of the living influence the condition of the dead? Addressing this question is important because it will reveal an imaginative connection between ritual practices and myths about the afterlife. It will also lead us to consider an issue raised earlier in this chapter, the efficaciousness of Islamic death rites. Did intercessory prayers and other ritual activities have the effect of releasing the deceased from the punishment of the grave?

The monotony of the dire existence of spirit and corpse was alleviated once a week, on *Jumʻa* or Friday, the day of general assembly at the mosque, a day when the living also gathered frequently to pray for the dead at the cemetery.[101] The dead, in turn, celebrated a day of respite from their mundane punishments. Apparently, on this day, the gates of Gehenna are locked, rendering it impossible for the angels Munkar and Nakīr to carry out the inquisition (*fitnat al-qabr*) that must always culminate with the opening of the grave to reveal a glimpse of Hell-fire. Possibly for this reason, Muslims fortunate enough to die on Friday gained an exemption from the brutal questioning of the angels.[102] It is important to understand that a connection perhaps existed between the cyclical suspension of the punishment in the grave (*ʻadhāb al-qabr*) and the custom of visiting the graves (*ziyārat al-qubūr*). In this context, this custom refers not to the well-known cult of the saints, the object of which was to retrieve *baraka,* a blessing, from the presence of the holy at venerated tombs.[103] It refers instead to the ritual of praying in an intercessory fashion on behalf of the dead. Both of these rituals involved visiting graves and pleading, but whereas in the first case, the visitor would entreat in his own favor, in the second case, she would do so in favor of the deceased.[104] Islamic ideologues sharply opposed the first but not the second ritual. They would distinguish permissible from reprehensible visits to the cemetery. The Ḥanbalites Ibn ʻAqīl (d. 1119) and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), for example, abhorred visits to the grave when the purpose of visitors was to flirt with members of the opposite sex or to seek, whether selfishly or superstitiously, blessings from the dead. They were not bothered by visits to the cemetery when these followed the protocols of Muslim tradition: to remind oneself of the transience of life or to entreat God for mercy on behalf of the dead.[105]

Opposition to this ritual, carried out for the benefit of the dead, emerged from a different quarter. Certain philosophers, learned in Aristotelian natural physics and the Galenic-Hippocratic scheme of humoral pathology, believed that the “rational soul” or “sensual spirit” perished with the death of the body. This soul or spirit depended for its existence on a harmonious mixture of the four humors: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. When a pronounced disorder occurred in the composition of these essential bodily fluids, the human person would become gravely ill and die. With the dissolution of the four humors, the sensual spirit or rational soul would also cease to exist. Characterizing the tension between the religious and the philosophical approaches, the Muslim Neoplatonist al-ʻĀmirī (d. 992) wrote:

> Now the great majority of leaders of the religious communities [*arbāb al-milal*] believe that [the spirit] survives after death, the angel of death taking it at the time of the agony of death [*naz‘].* [They believe also] that the pious petitionary prayers [*al-ad‘iya al-ṣāliḥa],* devout ritual prayers, constant donations of alms, and continual intercessory pleas that the living make for the sake of the dead [*niyyat al-mawtā*] are of benefit [to the dead] and give them joy. But all of these are philosophical bogies, and there is no profit in practicing them, beyond [that of] performing [prescribed] acts of worship [*al-‘ibāda],* for the bodies [of the dead] have been transformed into inanimate solids, and [their] spirits have been annihilated and lost.[106]

From the philosophical perspective, rituals on behalf of this annihilated spirit made absolutely no sense.

Yet there were, as this passage implies, a number of ways by which Muslim visitors to the grave endeavored to alter the condition of the dead. By placing a fresh date-palm leaf at the grave, they would seek to relieve the punishment of the grave for a while. So long as the plant remained green and moist, it countered the desiccation of the corpse. Reportedly, Muḥammad himself had participated in this ritual, though without believing fully in its efficacy. “Perhaps,” he declared, the deed “will lighten [their agony] until [the palm leaves] dry up” (*la‘allahu an yukhaffafa ‘anhumā mā lam yaybasā*).[107] By wrapping the dead person in the finest shrouds, the living would enable the dead to “exchange visits” (*yatazāwarūna*) elegantly attired. Indeed, burial in thin shrouds was such a disgrace that a mother appealed to her daughter from the grave to find four hidden dinars, purchase for her a new shroud, and send it along with a friend about to join the company of the dead. Not trusting such a means of delivery, Mu ‘ādh ibn Jabal had his wife’s corpse exhumed (she had died while he was away) and shrouded her in new wraps.[108]

By burying their relatives in prime land, proximate to dead saints whose blessings might spread to neighboring graves, families also expected favorable effects. “Bury your dead amidst pious folk,” Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 1176) declared in his history of Damascus, “for indeed a dead individual is wronged by a wicked neighbor just as a living person is wronged by a wicked neighbor.” In *The Book of the Graves,* Ibn Abī al-Dunyā tells the story of a man apparently destined to join the society of the fire yet somehow initiated into the society of the Garden. He was asked how he accomplished such a reversal of fortune. “A pious man was buried amongst us, so he interceded [*shafā‘a*] for forty of his neighbors, and I was amongst them,” replied the lucky man.[109] This belief in the immaterial benefit that would result from burial in proximity to the pious certainly affected burial practice: archaeologists have remarked how, in Muslim cemeteries, graves tend to cluster around the tombs of saints.[110]

Perhaps the most significant influence on the circumstances and well-being of the dead took the form of prayers. Invocations (*da‘awāt*) had an electrifying quality. As one uttered these prayers, it was hoped the words would become transformed into light and flicker in the dark tomb. For the dead, these blessings were like food and water, absolutely necessary. Regaled with the aroma of basil and the paradisiacal shroud known by the name of *sundus,* a deceased mother who had dreaded God in life confessed to her surviving son that she had been enjoying herself in a “charmed limbo.” Yet she felt the need (*ḥāja*) for his visits and intercession. Another son, who had been accustomed to visiting his father every day, returned to the grave after a lapse of time, fell asleep, and was haunted by a nightmare of his father with shrouds disarrayed, the mien of death upon him. The distraught father confessed to the guilty son that he had been aware of all his previous visits and had been cheered by the intercessions.[111]

Over the course of the late eighth century, Muslims became ever more keen on praying for God to relieve the deceased from the punishment of the grave. Epitaphs from the last quarter of the eighth century, we have seen, began to include prayers for God to insinuate to the deceased his proof of personal belief and to protect him from grave tortures.[112] We can appreciate this trend further by considering, besides changes in the tombstone record, the emergence of new, formal, and legally sanctioned funerary prayers. The intercessory prayer for the deceased (*al-du‘ā’ li` l-mayyit*) that al-Shāfi‘ī recommended pleaded with God “to shelter” his slave “from the torments of the grave” (*wa-qi-hi ‘adhāba `l-qabr*). Considering “nothing in this intercession appointed by law” (*muwaqqat*), al-Shāfi‘ī advocated this prayer without invoking any authority. This implies that he was aware of a number of variants, none of which seemed to him well grounded in Muslim tradition. Significantly, he did not represent this prayer as if rooted in the practice of Muḥammad. One funerary prayer (*al-Ṣalāt ‘alā `l-janā’iz*) associated with Abū Hurayra (d. ca. 678) pleaded in stark tones for God to reward his good slave and overlook any of his evil actions, without alluding to any specific belief in the afterlife in the grave. But an alternative prayer, also associated with Abū Hurayra, makes clear that already by the middle of the eighth century, if not earlier, a prayer had emerged in Medina seeking the release of the deceased from the punishment of the grave. Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd (ibn Qays al-Anṣārī, d. ca. 761) told Mālik he had heard Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab (d. ca. 712) say: “I prayed once behind Abū Hurayra in favor of a [dead] boy who had never committed a transgression, and I heard him say, ‘O God, protect him from the torture of the grave.’ “[113]

In addition to performing these rituals in the service of the deceased, there was another way in which Muslims acted on behalf of the dead: they spent money (or dates) to set right an imperfect record. Thus, in the Muslim version of the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Muḥammad replenished heaps of dates so as to satisfy the creditors of an indebted martyr from the battle of Uḥud. In this moral economy, sons rushed to distribute alms (*Ṣadaqa*) on behalf of recently deceased mothers, especially if they had died unexpectedly (*faj’atan*) and with an unfulfilled vow (*nadhr*).[114] As a result, the deceased would not need to suffer on account of outstanding debts or promises.

While these examples count as instances of an effort to influence the fate of the deceased in a positive way, Muslims also believed it was possible to affect the dead negatively. On the day of the battle of Badr, the Prophet invoked evil upon (*daʿā ʿalā*) polytheists from Quraysh. As a result of this curse, the polytheists all putrefied rapidly under a blazing sun.[115] Corpses appeared more or less liable to a biological process of decomposition or to dismemberment depending on whether they belonged to Muslims or to their enemies. When the infidels of Quraysh sought to take a part of the body of ʿĀṣim ibn Thābit, one of the Muslim martyrs, a swarm of wasps foiled the attempt, hovering over the corpse protectively. But the body of an obese polytheist from the tribe of Quraysh easily disassembled when the Muslims dragged it toward the well where they dumped the corpses of other polytheists. Before the fat polytheist met this gruesome end, Muḥammad had cursed him as well as several other chiefs from the tribe of Quraysh, after a man from the enemy tribe had thrown a camel’s intestines on Muḥammad’s back while he lay prostrated in prayer.[116]

Though sanctioned by orthodoxy, works and prayers on behalf of dead individuals were not to be doled out indiscriminately. It was imperative for the practitioners of Islamic rituals to determine whether or not the subject in question truly deserved the indulgence. To offer a prayer seeking God’s mercy was problematic, as we have seen, in the case of hypocrites, adulterous women, and suicide victims. Interceding with God on behalf of non-Muslims seemed even more troublesome. God had permitted Muḥammad to visit the tomb of his dead mother, who had died a pagan, but not to plead for forgiveness on her behalf.[117] Underlying these wary restrictions was the sense that

Muslims acted as “God’s witnesses on earth.” Their collective praise or disparagement, as we have seen, appeared to guarantee individuals a place in Paradise or Hell.[118] God had invested in the community an awesome power. It behooved Muslims to use it responsibly.

On the basis of the evidence, the impression might easily be gathered that early Islam was what Mary Douglas would call a “ritualistic” religion: a religion whose rituals were more than simply formal, commemorative occasions; they seemed, rather, imbued with a sense of symbolic or magical efficacy.[119] This impression must be qualified in several respects. First, the early Islamic tradition did not represent death rituals as mechanisms that would automatically deliver immediate gratification. The religious rewards of ritual action were generally deferred in a promise of future deliverance. It was never altogether evident that a ritual performed for the benefit of the dead would have the desired effect: its efficaciousness depended on whether or not a given individual deserved God’s mercy. What was clear, however, was that the man performing a good deed on behalf of the dead would himself eventually become a beneficiary in the afterlife.

In general, the connection drawn between rituals and the afterlife was based on individual accomplishments, as in the oral tradition that Ibn Abī al-Dunyā ascribed to Tamīm al-Dārī. Torture personified would endeavor to attack a corpse defended by its own works. The severity and duration of the punishment in the grave depended above all on the measure of a Muslim’s sins and the extent to which these were counterbalanced by repentance, pious works, and a sound faith. During life, one accumulated a record of good deeds by, for example, accompanying funerary processions and lingering at the grave for the duration of the funerary prayer.[120] These supererogatory works, alongside acts of worship (*‘ibādāt*), accumulated in a savings account toward retirement in the grave.

Still, certain rituals represented in the Muslim tradition do seem suggestive of a belief in immediate magical efficacy. Consider, for instance, the tradition about Muḥammad planting a date palm in the grave so as to relieve the suffering of the dead. Not unlikely, in the popular practice of this ritual, the perception was that the date palm operated mysteriously as an indulgence: by planting it, one triggered a remission from the purgatorial or retributive punishments of the grave. Traditionists, however, did not view the ritual as necessarily efficacious. Muḥammad, according to their remembrance, performed the act without being certain about its transcendental effects. Desirous of imitating Muḥammad, traditionists could easily perform the ritual without believing fully in its efficacy. Their action would be in essence commemorative. Its purpose would be to draw a symbolic link between their practice in the present and the practice of Muḥammad in the past.

A ritual thus performed counted, of course, as a religious action. Thus, traditionists canonized many rituals for one reason alone: their presumed historical connection to Muḥammad. The presence or absence of any supernatural element was beside the point. It is for this reason that Islamic law prescribes in detail the proper manner of acting in relation to Muḥammad, but only rarely offers interpretations about the ultimate meaning of the rituals or the religious consequences of wrongdoing.[121]

Finally, one senses Muslim doubts about the efficaciousness of death rituals by considering the role of God. What would happen, one might ask, if the Muslim community erred and prayed on behalf of someone who deserved to be punished? Would God succumb to the will of the community or would he mete out justice fairly? Conversely, one might ask: what would happen to dead individuals if they deserved salvation and mercy but God's witnesses on earth believed otherwise and therefore refused to grant them an honorable burial? Such questions readily occur to us, but they may be the wrong questions to ask if our aim is to understand the early Muslim mentality. These questions assume human agency independent of God's sovereignty and suggest the possibility of ritual accidents. All this is alien to the spirit of early Muslims, who subscribed to a Calvinistic fatalism several centuries before the Protestant Reformation. They performed rituals with care and solicitude, trusting in the belief that rituals work or fail depending on God's will and his subject's predestination.

An examination of what we might call ritual accidents, preserved in anecdotal form in Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's *Book of the Graves,* should serve to illustrate the early Islamic view of ritual efficacy. Summoned to wash a corpse, a man finds a snake wrapped tightly around the dead man's neck. So he bolts out, without preparing the body for burial. The dead man, he later discovers, had been accustomed to cursing the Prophet's Companions.[122] Upon his corpse were outward signs of inner corruption that alerted the corpse washer to the fact that the man did not deserve grace. Nonhuman agents had already determined the fate of the individual, so the ritual practitioner withdrew, making no endeavor to bend or counter the unfolding of divine justice. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā tells us also about a special niche (*laḥd*) carved in the grave of a less than upright merchant. It collapsed repeatedly, despite the efforts of gravediggers. In another anecdote, a pious ancestor (*salaf*) relates that he had placed his daughter properly in the grave only to find her countenance suddenly turning away from the *qibla,* the correct orientation for Muslim burial. So he began worrying greatly. Later on, she appeared to him in a dream and said that her dead neighbors had diverted themselves from the *qibla,* so she followed suit, meekly imitating their incorrect form. Evidently, the ancestor explains, they all died persisting in great sins.[123]

Similarly, we learn from al-Bukhārī that the earth time and again repelled the corpse of an apostate, a Christian who had converted to Islam and worked as a scribe for the prophet Muḥammad but later reverted to his original religion. Initially, the Christians who witnessed this disgrace wondered if Muslims had exhumed the body, so as to punish it. Eventually, however, they became convinced that the deed was not done by human beings.[124] Once again, in this as in the previous examples, it becomes clear that the ultimate actor is God. There is no such thing as a ritual accident. Whenever necessary, God's will overrides the inclination of ritual practitioners. It determines whether a ritual will work or fail and whether a corpse will be punished or blessed.

Evil corpses tended to exude a nauseating, offensive smell, succumbing readily to worms.[125] Oppressed by the force of gravity, as the earth weighed down upon brittle bones, they would feel the grave becoming constrictive. Good corpses dwelled in a world ruled by altogether different laws, in commodious and fragrant graves. Divine justice reigned in these spaces. Herein lay bodies mostly incorruptible, no longer subject to the physics of this world but to the metaphysics of *al-barzakh,* sometimes punished for minor sins, at other times defended by good works. An individual might have successfully disguised sin in this world, but not after death. Hiding was no longer possible. Noxious smells and signs of putrefaction would begin to emerge quickly from the corpse, and these were interpreted as symbols of personal corruption, outward signs of past hypocrisy and religious shortcomings. No wonder Muslims took such care of dead bodies, washing them in camphor, enveloping them in shrouds, and rushing to seal them in the grave. In this scheme, where ritual failure revealed or portended a bad end for the deceased subject, rituals mattered.

EPILOGUE

Death Rites and the Process of Islamic Socialization

"Of all the sources of religion," wrote the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, "the supreme and final crisis of life—death—is of the greatest importance." An individual's death "breaks the normal course of life" and "threatens the very cohesion and solidarity" of the community; the danger arises that the crowd of the bereft will succumb to violent emotions and engage in destructive behavior. "And here," he said, "into this play of emotional forces … religion steps in." By its mortuary rites and beliefs about the afterlife, it works to counteract "the centrifugal forces of fear, dismay, demoralization" and provides "the most powerful means of reintegration of a group's shaken solidarity."[1]

Unlike anthropologists, early Islamic pietists rarely focused on the unifying function of death rituals. They did perceive death as a crisis that required funerary prayers and other rituals to restore the social order and reestablish a sense of communal solidarity. But in the process of establishing a new religion, they came to see death rites as an opportunity for social change. These rituals, they realized, could serve to create new boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims and deepen existing boundaries between men and women. They could also serve to impose a hierarchy that would place patriarchs and religious experts on top, heretics and wailing women at the bottom.

A Muslim funeral did, of course, bring a community of mourners together. Perhaps a hundred individuals would attend an ordinary ceremony in a city of several thousand inhabitants. During the prayer for the dead, this fraction of a society could feel the power of orderly, communal action. If an emotional round of lamentation interrupted this prescribed prayer, violating Islamic standards, all individuals in attendance might feel unexpectedly overcome by a meaningful sentiment of social unity. More likely than not, however, any male pietists present at the ceremony would react to such a pagan demonstration with more revulsion than understanding and experience, if anything, a profound sense of alienation.[2]

The struggle over wailing for the dead is expressive of a conflict between two divergent modes of religiosity. One mode can be called, in honor of pre-Islamic times, “the *Jāhilī* mode.” Spontaneous, emotional, and violent rituals, sanctioned by traditional or ancestral practice, characterize this mode. These rituals ultimately culminate in a sense of catharsis and in a feeling of social solidarity. In the case of wailing, a group of mourners might emerge from the traumatic experience bonded by grief and by the knowledge of having jointly defied a religious ideal in order to express the shock of bereavement. The second, “Islamic” mode may be characterized by an insistence on conformity to traditionist, dogmatic beliefs and by an emphasis on routinization. The ideal Islamic funeral is orchestrated and predictable. It may be reenacted in the exact same manner again and again in different places of the Islamic world, always with reference to the works of Muḥammad, his wives, and the earliest converts to Islam. Rather than permitting unruly and chaotic behavior, the Islamic mode established fixed norms as well as a strict social order. In practice as in theory, the two modes coexisted and were in fact interdependent. Islamic rituals did not altogether displace Jāhilī rituals, which continued to operate, though in an altered frame of reference, after the rise of Islam. They simply represented the orthodox standard, an ideal to which Muslims renewed their commitment after observing or participating in Jāhilī rites. In this sense, Jāhilī rituals have played an integral role in Islamic history, having worked to reenergize Muslims in their commitment to the cause of Islam.[3]

To characterize two modes is to speak in abstractions. In practice, wailing women typically behaved in predictable ways: they raised their hands, tore their hair, and lamented with conventional poems that followed a familiar rhythm. As for the experts who formulated the Islamic ritual order, they acted in an unexpected manner whenever they failed to follow the precedents established in a code of law that already incorporated a variety of opinions, sanctioned a multiplicity of actions, and recorded a number of personal affectations. Nevertheless, the abstractions are valid, because wailers craved spontaneity, celebrated individual expressions, and thrived in the breakdown of order as much as pietists defended structure, appreciated stability, and invoked tradition.

In addition to drawing a line dividing the Muslim from the Jāhilī, pietists drew a line dividing the Islamic from the Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian. They adopted a dogma upholding the purity of Muslim corpses and on this basis handled corpses with impunity, thereby differing sharply from Zoroastrian notions about corpse pollution as well as Zoroastrian strictures on handling dead matter. Second, pietists at times refused to rise in honor of the dead, as Jews customarily did, because they believed it desirable for the Muslim community to differentiate itself from the Jewish one. Third, Muslims inscribed their tombstones with anti-Trinitarian verses of the Qur'ān, signaling their divergence from Christian doctrine. Despite these attempts at religious and social distinction, Muslims lived in close proximity to non-Muslims and participated, as good neighbors and relatives, in non-Muslim funerals. Islamic law permitted a Muslim son to prepare his infidel father's corpse for burial and to join an infidel neighbor's funeral procession. In practice, the funerals of Muslim sons must have resembled the funerals of non-Muslim fathers more than Islamic law reveals.

One of the exciting aspects of studying death rituals at the rise of Islam has been the opportunity to see what role these rituals played in the making of Islamic society. In this framework, rituals do not appear as inert expressions of a religion and a society, but as dynamic forms designed to bring about a social and religious transformation. Pietists sought to enact an Islamic funeral that would resonate with Muslim scripture and with their memories of Muḥammad. They wanted, moreover, to Islamicize the body and society. Their ambitious project of Islamization began with the birth of Islam and continues in some form to this day, yet the most significant changes occurred between the turn of the eighth and the turn of the ninth century. The commemoration of Muḥammad's death by the family of Islam, in a tombstone of 691, as well as the demolition and reconstruction of Muḥammad's sepulcher, around 707, established some of the earliest landmarks. Significant changes continued to occur over the course of the eighth century, as pietists marshaled oral traditions in the hope of altering the future in the name of the past.

To Islamicize the body, pietists proposed that the dead and the dying face the Ka'ba in Mecca, as Muslims did in their daily prayers. They declared Muslim corpses pure and treated them with great reverence. They veiled the zone of shame during preparations for burial, perfumed the parts of the body that had been most exercised in ritual prostration, and shrouded corpses in plain white clothes that had been used on Fridays to worship at the mosque. They held, also, that the practice of Muslim rituals—prayer, fasting, almsgiving—would affect the Muslim body in the afterlife. The members of the body associated with these religious activities would work to protect the corpse from the punishment of the tomb, defending it in mysterious ways from bacterial decomposition.

To Islamicize society, pietists considered various categories of social differentiation based on religious, political, and economic divisions. In discussions on the ideal person to lead the prayer over the dead, for instance, they favored family patriarchs and learned jurists over governors. The analysis of legal anecdotes concerning shroud gifts showed how pietists spurned certain social ties while reinforcing others. According to a pietistic story, as Abū Dharr lay dying in a desolate land, he refused to accept the gift of burial garments from a commander, an overseer, or a messenger journeying on a post horse —that is, potentially corrupt people associated with the government. Pietists did, however, favor shroud gifts when these served to forge social bonds that they approved of, such as the bond created by means of a gift between the ascetic ʻĀmir ibn ʻAbd Qays and the hungry shepherdess in need of clothes for the grave.

In discussions on burial attire, funerary candles, and tomb construction, pietists generally decried opulence and celebrated austerity. In the matter of shrouds, on the other hand, they adopted a bourgeois standard that families of middling resources could reach with some difficulty and that paupers would find prohibitively high. Economic distinctions were not drawn explicitly in terms of class, but rather in terms of objects. Thus, pietists would praise fellow pietists who had declared in their last will that they did not want the lavish expenditure of candles in their funerals. It mattered little to them if the dying pietist was rich or poor. What mattered was his disregard for the goods of this world.

One category of social differentiation, sex, preoccupied pietists in particular. Indeed, the project of Islamic socialization was to a high degree an endeavor to segregate the sexes in public and private and to empower men of religion, rather than women, in public rituals. To impose an Islamic social order meant primarily to abolish Jāhilī ways. Whereas women had participated freely in and had even dominated Jāhilī rituals, as these were represented after the rise of Islam, they faced all sorts of restrictions under the new Islamic order. Unlike the “barbarous” women who had wailed for the dead, “civilized” Muslim men knew how to bear the tragedy of an individual’s death with composure and were able, with their emotions under control, to conduct a prayer for the dead precisely as dictated by Islamic law.

The most significant departures from the Jāhilī ritual mode occurred in the booming garrison cities of Mesopotamia over the course of the eighth century. It was in Kūfa and Baṣra that pietists developed a novel program to extend the sexual boundary. Their laws to reduce mingling between the sexes and to prevent women from performing traditional ritual acts usually had little or no precedent in Medinese, Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian funerary law. Two examples, concerning a public and a private ritual, should suffice to highlight the new tendency of Iraqi law.

Like the Muslim Oral Tradition, the Babylonian Talmud and the Nestorian Synod of 676 contain injunctions to dissuade women from lamenting for the dead in a violent fashion. The similarity ends here. Whereas the rabbis encouraged bereft women to express their grief in moderation and the clerics urged religious women to accompany funeral processions while singing the psalms, Muslim pietists from the cities of Mesopotamia associated the public rites of women with temptation and blameworthy innovation. They related traditions, likely forged, to prevent women from joining funeral processions, despite the fact that Medinese norms sanctioned the mingling of men and women on the occasion of someone's death. They boasted that respectable jurists and traditionists, Kūfan men such as Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī and Manṣūr ibn al-Muʿtamir, "used to padlock women indoors so that the men could depart for the funerary processions." And they extolled caliph ʿUmar I for having zealously struck wailing women with a stick and thrown dust in their mouths. Evidently, Mesopotamian pietists did not simply adopt the patriarchal ideals of Arabian Muslims nor of Jews and Christians from Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean world. Rather, they transformed old ideals and developed new ones.

The private ritual of washing corpses reveals how Kūfan and Baṣran pietists challenged Medinese norms. In eighth-century Medina, it had been not uncommon for family members, male or female, to participate in the washing of a relative's corpse, regardless of its sex. This social dimension of the ritual of separation bothered Iraqi pietists, who argued that, in Islamic civilization, the sexual barrier should not be crossed for the purposes of preparing a corpse for burial. They challenged the washing of a woman's corpse by her surviving husband on the grounds that the moment of death signaled the breaking of the marriage contract, effectively turning a husband and his dead wife into strangers of opposite sexes. In their eyes, men would ideally wash male corpses and women female corpses. Having divided the body into erogenous zones requiring protection and religious zones demanding appreciation, male pietists considered it best for their own corpses to be prepared for burial not by their wives but by other male pietists.

By the late eighth century, it became clear to Arabian and Mesopotamian jurists that key distinctions had emerged between them in their answers to the question about women's role in Islamic funerals. These differences remained operative as Islamic jurisprudence developed, though increasingly they would be framed in reference to the teachings of a sect or school of law. Thus, for instance, Ḥanafite jurists inherited Kūfan biases and thus tended to advance the most severe restrictions on women's works. The Mālikites who inherited the Medinese mantle, by contrast, tended to favor a milder approach—one tolerating, though not always appreciating, the traditional rites of women in the face of death. Taken together, these distinctions demonstrate why a crude teleological approach to the historical problem at hand is misconceived. As Islam developed after the Arab conquests, it did not affect women's lives in the same way everywhere. Islam became geographically and ideologically differentiated. Consequently, women's funerary experiences came to diverge, depending on whether they lived in Medina or Kūfa, with a Mālikite or a Ḥanafite family.

Given that an Imam might well refuse to deliver a prayer for the deceased unless the community that had gathered for the event would agree to submit to his idea of the right social order, we must not underestimate the power of the Islamic ideology of praxis. Under the right circumstances, a man empowered to conduct this ritual, the funerary prayer, could persuade a Muslim society to conform to the prescribed canon. Yet, conversely, we should not overestimate the ability of religious leaders to realize their ideal social order and in the process control individuals as well as crowds. Traditions on the rites of wailing showed how women devised strategies to act within a set of constraints. Let us remember how women continued to wail for the dead and to visit cemeteries despite traditionist pleas. Muslim men also resisted certain laws. Abū Qilāba, a Baṣran jurist, washed his daughter's corpse, despite Islamic reservations about the practice. Muʻādh ibn Jabal, a judge practicing law in south Arabia, exhumed his wife's corpse, to the admiration and shock of all, in order to provide her with a dignified set of shrouds. In the process, he made a mockery of the jurists who argued that the marital bond vanished at death.

Finally, the new rule of men, which emerged with the Arab conquests, can be appreciated with reference to a shift in the commemoration of family bonds on tombstones. In tombstones that quoted the Qur'ān in an innovative way, the Muslims from Arabia and the Mediterranean world came to commemorate exclusively patrilineal kinship, that is, the relation of men and women to their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers. Pre-Islamic Arabian tombstones were much less patriarchal. Indeed, let us remember the Hasaean tombstone from Thāj, belonging to Ghadhiyat and boasting matrilineal descent, and the Nabataean sepulcher from Mada'in Salih, designed to shelter Wushūḥ and her daughters. Jewish and Christian tombstones likewise reflected a range of family ties, forging bonds with not just fathers, but mothers and husbands as well. The inevitable conclusion is that the Islamization of death entailed the rise of both Qur'ānic forms and Muslim patriarchs.

The historical origins of this new patriarchal rule lie in the cities founded by the Arab conquerors. The Baṣran and Kūfan ideologues who developed the sacred law of funerary practices over the course of the eighth century were intimately concerned with the Islamization of family and gender relations. Harking back to the funerals of Mecca and Medina from Muḥammad’s age, they promoted a creative and ambitious ideological system that became highly effective and served to establish a new pattern of dominance first in the cities of Mesopotamia and eventually, with mixed success, elsewhere in the Islamic world.

List of Abbreviations

AI	*Annales Islamologiques*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
BT	*Babylonian Talmud* (Wilna 1880–1886)
EI^1	*Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 1st ed. (Leiden 1913–1938)
EI^2	*Encyclopaedia of Islam,* new ed. (Leiden 1954–2004)
GAL	C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*
GAS	F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle East Studies*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JSAI	*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*
KJ	*Kitāb al-janā’iz, Abwāb al-janā’iz,* or *Aḥkām al-mayyit*
SFMA	H. al-Hawary, H. Rached, and G. Wiet, eds., *Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire: Stèles funéraires*
RCEA	Ét. Combe, J. Sauvaget, and G. Wiet, eds., *Répertoire Chronologique d’épigraphie arabe*
REI	*Revue des Études Islamiques*

Notes

All translations from Arabic sources are my own unless indicated otherwise. Often I consulted N.J. Dawood's translation of the Qur'ān and Muḥammad M. Khān's translation of al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ,* but modified their phrasing as I saw fit in light of the Arabic original. I consulted the Babylonian Talmud both in reprints of the standard 1880–1886 edition of Wilna and in the English Soncino translations conducted under the editorship of I. Epstein. Transliterations from the Arabic follow the system recommended by the Library of Congress, widely used in English books.

Auxiliary sources, though frequently consulted, are rarely cited. For the purposes of translation, I used most often Edward William Lane's *An Arabic-English Lexicon.* For context and general information, I turned to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition.* For biographical sketches of traditionists, I usually turned to Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb.*

This last work not infrequently specifies several different years for an individual's death. Providing all the possibilities in the Muslim calendar would be awkward and not particularly informative, since the date of an individual's death rarely corresponds to the (usually unknown) date of oral transmission. Ordinarily, I selected an authoritative date or took the average of two outlying dates, and converted it to the Gregorian calendar. These dates should be recognized as approximations; they are usually preceded by an abbreviation for circa. Unless indicated otherwise, dates refer to the Common Era (CE), not to the Hijra (AH).

KJ, an important abbreviation used in the notes, stands for *Kitāb al-Janā'iz,* the "Book on Funerary Practices." It also serves to designate sections entitled *Abwāb al-Janā'iz* or *Aḥkām al-mayyit.* Most collections of oral tradition and Islamic law include a book (or chapter) by one of these cognate titles; these books (or chapters) vary from one another in content and style. (Collections that do not include such a book might place a section on the washing of corpses in the book on purity rites and a section on praying for the dead in the book on prayer.) Except for first citations, KJ references are normally given without specifying volume number; the bibliography at the end of the book provides the volume, as well as the range of pages, for KJ books or chapters. This method of citation is economical and should facilitate future research of the genre. Citations to primary sources often refer to specific traditions or legal discussions, as numbered by editors; in such cases, it usually seemed superfluous to specify page numbers.

Introduction. Funerary Traditions and the Making of Islamic Society

1. Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā (Biographien Muhammeds),* ed. E. Sachau (Leiden, 1904–1940), 8:17–18. According to this tradition's transmission history, Salmā related the anecdote to a son she had with her husband, Abū Rāfi' the Copt, who related it to their grandson, 'Alī ibn Fulān ('Ubaydallāh) ibn Abī Rāfi', who related

it in turn to the famous biographer of the Prophet, Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), who finally related it to a Medinese transmitter of Ibn Isḥāq's work, Ibrāhīm Ibn Sa‘d (d. 800). There exist other versions of Fāṭima's death that contradict this one in various details.

2. Clearly, then, "Islamization" here refers neither to conversion to Islam nor to the transformation that Muslims must undergo to adhere more strictly to preexisting, well-established Islamic norms. *The Oxford English Dictionary,* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1989), defines the verb "Islamize" rather narrowly, yet provides more expansive definitions, here adapted, of "Christianize" and "Judaize." In discussing Islamization in reference to the emergence of Islam, the historian must be careful not to distinguish arbitrarily between Islamic and non-Islamic forms. Attention should be drawn to forms, such as Qur'ānic quotations, that Muslims would readily recognize as "Islamic."

3. Recent studies on early Muslim rituals have shown how ritual details were widely debated; divergence of opinion about the right practice has served, in turn, to suggest ritual variety as well as historical change. See, for instance, M. J. Kister, *Society and Religion from Jāhiliyya to Islam* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 1990), article XIII; Uri Rubin, "The Ka‘ba: Aspects of Its Ritual Functions and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times," *JSAI* 8 (1986): 97–130; G. R. Hawting, "'We were not ordered with entering it but only with circumambulating it.' *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh* on Entering the Ka‘ba," *BSOAS* 47 (1984): 228–242; Roberto Tottoli, "Traditions and Controversies Concerning *Suğūd al-Qur'ān* in *Ḥadīṯ* Literature," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 147 (1997): 371–393; and Marion Holmes Katz, *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunnī Law of Ritual Purity* (Albany, 2002).

4. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Al-Kitāb al-muṣannaf fī al-aḥâādīth wa al-āthār,* ed. ‘Āmir al-‘Umarī al-A‘ẓamī (Bombay, 1979), 3: KJ, 239. Mālikite sources express some reservations about the ritual. The legal topic in question *(tawjīh al-mayyit, tawjīh al-muḥtaḍar)* rarely appears in works of Oral Tradition. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-ṣaḥīḥayn* (Beirut, 1990), 1: KJ, no. 41/1305, records a tradition holding that al-Barā' ibn Ma‘rūr, perhaps the first Muslim to pray in the direction of Mecca rather than Jerusalem, asked to be turned to face the *qibla* in the throes of death. Al-Ḥākim then comments that this was the only tradition he knew of about turning the dying person to face the *qibla.* A generation before al-Ḥākim, the Ismā‘īlī judge al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā'im al-Islām,* ed. Āsif ‘Alī Aṣghar Fayḍī (Cairo, 1963), 1: KJ, 219, knew of other traditions recommending the practice.

5. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago, 1977), 1:89, 315, 317, 346. Note that Hodgson's concern was not with the creation of the *Sharī‘a* but with its application after the rise of the ‘Abbāsid dynasty in 750. The pietists' program of Islamization, though ambitious, was far from all-encompassing. Pietists typically failed to provide specific guidelines to regulate practices, such as the inscription of epitaphs, that they found disagreeable. It is important also to bear in mind how much divergence of opinion existed among them about the constitution of this program. Chase F. Robinson, "Reconstructing Early Islam: Truth and Consequences," in Herbert Berg, ed., *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Leiden, 2003), 101–134, at 104–105 and elsewhere, has argued persuasively against the view of Islam as a civilization and a "totalizing" religion that encompasses all fields of human belief and action.

6. Historians of medieval Europe have had a longstanding interest in funerary rituals and beliefs about the afterlife that precedes the imaginative and influential books by Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore, 1974) and *The Hour of Our Death,* trans. H. Weaver (New York, 1981). For pioneering treatments, see Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the*

Middle Ages, trans. R. Payton and U. Mammitzsch (Chicago, 1996), chap. 5, originally published in 1921; and Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J., 1957), chap. 7. Of medieval Europeanists' studies, I have found stimulating Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981); Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory,* trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago, 1984); Frederick Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990); Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1995); and Éric Rebillard, *Religion et Sépulture: L'Église, les vivants et les morts dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris, 2003). On the connection between early medieval historiography and archaeology, see Bonnie Effros, *Merovingian Mortuary Archaeology and the Making of the Early Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Calif., 2003). Anthropologists often trace their own professional interest in death rites to an essay by Robert Hertz, "Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort," *Année sociologique* 10 (1907): 48–137.

7. For genealogical purposes, on death rituals, see Ignace (Ignaz) Goldziher, "Le culte des ancêtres et le culte des morts chez les Arabes," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 10 (1884): 332–359; an updated version appears in the author's *Muslim Studies (Muhammedanische Studien),* ed. S. M. Stern, trans. C. R. Barber (London, 1967), vol. 1, excursus 2. In the 1950s, Irene Grütter surveyed the field, hinting at the importance of the subject for the cultural history of everyday life; see her "Arabische Bestattungsbräuche in früh-islamischer Zeit (nach Ibn Sa'd und Bukhārī)," *Der Islam* 31 (1954): 147–173; *Der Islam* 32 (1955): 79–104; and *Der Islam* 32 (1956): 168–194. Muḥammad Wafā, *Aḥkām al-janā'iz fī al-fiqh al-Islāmī* (Cairo, 1993), compares Sunni legal approaches to funerary practices. Maribel Fierro, "El espacio de los muertos: fetuas andalusíes sobre tumbas y cementerios," in Patrice Cressier et al., eds., *L'urbanisme dans l'Occident musulman au Moyen Âge: Aspects juridiques* (Madrid, 2000), 153–189, compares legal opinions to the archaeological record of Muslim Spain. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Death, Funeral Processions, and the Articulation of Religious Authority in Early Islam," *Studia Islamica* 93 (2001): 27–58, concentrates on the religious significance of popular participation in the funerals of prominent Muslim men.

For ethnographic, anthropological, and historical studies dealing with Muslims' funerals in modern times, see Hilma Granqvist, *Muslim Death and Burial: Arab Customs and Traditions Studied in a Village in Jordan* (Helsinki, 1965); Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 142–169; John R. Bowen, "Death and the History of Islam in Highland Aceh," *Indonesia* 38 (1984): 21–38; Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1989), 268–276; Lila Abu-Lughod, "Islam and the Gendered Discourses of Death," *IJMES* 25 (1993): 187–205; Marc Gaborieau, *Ni brahmanes ni ancêtres: Colporteurs musulmans du Népal* (Nanterre, 1993), 223–236; and Juan Eduardo Campo, "Between the Prescribed and the Performed: Muslim Ways of Death," in Kathleen Garces-Foley, ed., *Death and Religion in a Changing World* (Armonk, N.Y., 2005), chap. 7. I thank Juan Campo for sending me a copy of his article.

There exist, in addition, many studies on various aspects of death that do not focus on death rites. I shall cite them here selectively to give a sense of trends and major accomplishments. On funerary architecture, epitaphs, and the archaeology of death, see Yūsuf Rāġib, "Structure de la tombe d'apres le droit musulman," *Arabica* 39 (1992): 393–403; Thomas Leisten, *Architektur für Tote: Bestattung in architektonischem Kontext in den Kernländern der islamischen Welt zwischen 3./9. und 6./12. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1998); St. John Simpson, "Death and Burial in the

Late Islamic Near East: Some Insights from Archaeology and Ethnography," in Stuart Campbell and Anthony Green, eds., *The Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East* (Oxford, 1995), 240–251; and Timothy Insoll, "Death and Burial," in the author's *The Archaeology of Islam* (Oxford, 1999), 166–200. Finally, see Werner Diem and Marco Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs,* 3 vols. (Wiesbaden, 2004), a monumental study that approaches epitaphs as well as the culture of visiting tombs from a phenomenological perspective. I thank Teresa Bernheimer for bringing it to my attention.

Two articles on inheritance law have also made important contributions to the history of death. See David S. Powers, "The Islamic Inheritance System: A Socio-Historical Approach," in Chibli Mallat and Jane Conners, eds., *Islamic Family Law and the State* (London, 1990), 11–29; and Hiroyuki Yanagihashi, "The Doctrinal Development of '*Maraḍ al-Mawt*' in the Formative Period of Islamic Law," *Islamic Law and Society* 5 (1998): 326–358.

On the poetry of lament, see especially Mohammed Abdesselem, *Le thème de la mort dans la poésie arabe des origines à la fin du IIIe/IXe siècle* (Tunis, 1977); Pieter Smoor, "Death, The Elusive Thief: The Classical Arabic Elegy," in J. Bremer et al., eds., *Hidden Futures, Death, and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical, and Arabic-Islamic World* (Amsterdam, 1994), 151–176; and Gert Borg, *Mit Poesie vertreibe ich den Kummer meines Herzens: Eine Studie zur altarabischen Trauerklage der Frau* (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1997). On the related subjects of wailing, mourning, and commemorative atonement, see Fritz Meier, "Ein profetenwort gegen die totenbeweinung," *Der Islam* 50 (1973): 207–229 (my thanks to Gregor Schoeler for referring me to this article); G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance, and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth* (Cambridge, 1983), 96–133; G. R. Hawting, "The Tawwābūn, Atonement and 'Āshūrā'," *JSAI* 17 (1994): 166–181; and Fred Astren, "Depaganizing Death: Aspects of Mourning in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Islam," in John C. Reeves, ed., *Bible and Qurʾān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Atlanta, 2003), 183–199.

On the cult of the saints there are numerous studies, but see Christopher Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden, 1999); and Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, 2002).

On ways of dying, signs of the end of life, images of the afterlife, and sundry other thanatological studies, see Ragnar Eklund, *Life Between Death and Resurrection According to Islam* (Uppsala, 1941); Franz Rosenthal, "On Suicide in Islam," *JAOS* 66 (1946): 239–259; Thomas O'Shaughnessy, *Muhammad's Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur'anic Data* (Leiden, 1969); Michael W. Dols, "Plague in Early Islamic History," *JAOS* 94 (1974): 371–383; Yūsuf Rāġib, "Faux morts et enterrés vifs dans l'espace musulman," *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): 5–30; Leah Kinberg, "Interaction Between This World and the Afterworld in the Early Islamic Tradition," *Oriens* 29–30 (1986): 285–308; Aziz al-Azmeh, "Rhetoric for the Senses: A Consideration of Muslim Paradise Narratives," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 27 (1995): 215–231; E. Kohlberg, "Medieval Muslim Views on Martyrdom," *Mededelingen van de Afdeling Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, Deel* 60, no. 7 (1997): 281–307; Thomas Bauer, "Todesdiskurse im Islam," *Asiatische Studien* 53, no. 1 (1999): 5–16; and Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection,* new ed. (New York, 2002).

8. Of foundational works in medieval Islamic social history, see Richard Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972); and Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, N.J., 1980). Though very different methodologically, both books

are based on the literature of religious scholars, the *‘ulamā’,* between the tenth and the twelfth centuries.

9. I would have liked also to make further use of the archaeology of death in early Islam—to learn, for instance, about the contents of tombs, the layout of corpses, and the causes of death—but this field has yet to develop. Several studies of late medieval cemeteries exist, but besides technical works on shrouds and tombstones, we have next to nothing from the first two centuries of the Islamic era.

10. On the problem of dating, see Michael Cook, “Eschatology and the Dating of the Traditions,” *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies* I (1992): 23–47. See also Michael Cook, “The Heraclian Dynasty in Early Muslim Eschatology,” *al-Qant.ara* 13 (1992): 3–23; Wilferd Madelung, “Apocalyptic Prophecies in H. ims. in the Umayyad Age,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 31 (1986), 141–185; idem, “‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdi,” *JNES* 40 (1981): 291–305; David Cook, “Muslim Apocalyptic and Jihād,” *JSAI* 20 (1996): 66–104; idem, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, N.J., 2002), 36–49, 194, 330–331. These scholars have dated apocalyptic traditions effectively. Ironically, however, an inverse relationship exists between the datability of an oral tradition and its value as a historical source. Traditions that can be dated most accurately on the basis of outside evidence have the least novel information to share.

11. Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950) developed a method to link specific opinions delivered in the name of Muḥammad to particular personages from the eighth century. His work suggested that traditions were fabricated between a century and a century and a half after Muḥammad’s death. For an elaboration of the Schachtian method, see G. H. A. Juynboll’s *Muslim Tradition* and his *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Ḥadīth* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 1996).

The “common link” method of dating has several shortcomings, on which see Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1981), chap. 11; as well as his article “Eschatology and the Dating of the Traditions,” cited above. Cf. Andreas Görke, “Eschatology, History, and the Common Link: A Study in Methodology,” in Herbert Berg, ed., *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Leiden, 2003), 179–208; and Harald Motzki, “Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey,” *Arabica* 52 (2005): 230–242.

Reflecting further on the origins of oral traditions, several scholars have criticized and refined the basic Schachtian method. Gregor Schoeler and Harald Motzki have examined transmission histories alongside textual variants in what is known as *matn*-cum-*isnād* analysis. By Gregor Schoeler, see “Mündliche Thora und Ḥadīṭim Islam: Überlieferung, Schreibverbot, Redaktion,” *Der Islam* 66 (Berlin, 1989): 213–251; *Charakter und Authentie der Muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds* (Berlin, 1996); *Écrire et transmettre dans les débuts de l’Islam* (Paris, 2002), 7–14, 43–56, 71–89; and “Character and Authenticity of the Muslim Tradition on the Life of Muḥammad,” *Arabica* 48 (2002): 360–366. By Harald Motzki, see “*Quovadis Ḥadīṯ*-Forschung? Eine kritische Untersuchung von G. H. A. Juynboll: ‘Nāfi‘ the *Mawlā* of Ibn ‘Umar, and His Position in Muslim *Ḥadīth* Literature’,” *Der Islam* 73 (1996): 40–80. 193–231; “The *Muṣannaf* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan’ānī as a Source of Authentic *Aḥādīth* of the First Century A.H.,” *JNES* 50 (1991): 1–21; “The Prophet and the Cat: On Dating Mālik’s *Muwaṭṭa’* and Legal Traditions,” *JSAI* 22 (1998):18–83; *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh Before the Classical Schools,* trans. M. Katz (Leiden, 2002); and “The Question of the Authenticity of Muslim Traditions Reconsidered: A Review Article,” in Herbert Berg, ed., *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Leiden, 2003), 211–257. Also see Mohammed Shahab Ahmed, “The Satanic Verses Incident in the Memory of the Early Muslim Community: An Analysis of the Early Riwāyahs and their Isnāds”

(Ph.D. diss.:Princeton University, 1999); and Josef van Ess, *Der Fehltritt des Gelehrten: Die "Pest von Emmaus" und ihre theologischen Nachspiele* (Heidelberg, 2001), 381–392.

Source critics tend to favor early authors, yet late collections include early traditions, a point made by Michael Lecker, "The Death of the Prophet Muḥammad's Father: Did Wāqidī Invent Some of the Evidence?" *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 145 (1995): 9–27.

12. Muslims with critical expertise in *ḥadīth* readily recognize the problem of forgeries; see, for instance, Muḥammad Zubayr Ṣiddīqī, *Ḥadīth Literature: Its Origin, Development, and Special Features,* rev. ed. (Cambridge, 1993), 31–36. "Traditional Muslim scholars," according to Wael B. Hallaq, "assert the veracity of the *ḥadīth* merely in probabilistic terms." See his article "The Authenticity of Prophetic Ḥadīth: A Pseudo-Problem," *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 75–90. For arguments in favor of the authenticity and antiquity of the corpus of traditions, see M. M. A'ẓamī, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature* (Beirut, 1968); Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri,* vol. 2, *Qur'ānic Commentary and Tradition* (Chicago, 1967).

13. A recent publication has represented the divide as one between "skeptical" and "sanguine" scholars. Though useful, these categories obscure the fact that, post-*Hagarism,* scholars who have argued for the authentic transmission of selective traditions are moderately skeptical about their historicity. Revisionists, on the other hand, have been relatively sanguine in their approach to documentary evidence and non-Islamic sources. See Herbert Berg, "Competing Paradigms in the Study of Islamic Origins: Qur'ān 15:89–91," in Herbert Berg, ed., *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Leiden, 2003), 259–290.

14. For the quotation, see Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge, 1980), 14. She reached this conclusion with reference to the work of Albrecht Noth. In its iconoclastic phase, skeptical empiricism is best represented by Patricia Crone's and Michael Cook's *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977), a work that rejected the Muslim Tradition as a source for history. Since the publication of *Hagarism,* Crone and Cook have taken slightly different paths. Michael Cook has dealt with traditions that clearly originated after Muḥammad's death (pronouncements against the writing of the Oral Tradition, for instance) or traditions that are patently non-Ḥijāzī in origins (opinions about Magian cheese, for instance). Patricia Crone has dealt instead with laws that had appeared to historians, intuitively, as part of tribal, Arabian practice. Dismissing "traditions with purely Medinese" chains of transmission as late constructions, she has argued, in the revisionist mode, for extra-Arabian and Jewish origins. To appreciate these developments post-*Hagarism,* see Michael Cook, "Magian Cheese: An Archaic Problem in Islamic Law," *BSOAS* 47 (1984): 449–467; and Patricia Crone, "Jāhilī and Jewish Law: The Qasāma," *JSAI* 4 (1984): 153–201.

15. See Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1997), xii, 354.

16. See John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford, 1978); Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study,* 2nd ed. in collaboration with Lawrence Conrad, trans. M. Bonner (Princeton, N.J., 1994); L. Conrad, "'Umar at Sargh: The Evolution of an Umayyad Tradition on Flight from the Plague," in Stefan Leder, ed., *Story-Telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden, 1998), 489–528; idem, "The Conquest of Arwād: A Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near East," in A. Cameron and L. Conrad, eds., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East,* vol. 1, *Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, N.J., 1994), 317–401; D. A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic*

Past: The Legacy of ‘Ā’isha bint Abi Bakr (New York, 1994); and Uri Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, N.J., 1995).

17. Michael Cook, “The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition in Early Islam,” *Arabica* 44 (1997), i–iii, 437–530, connects successfully a set of traditions to the urban centers where eighth-century pietists flourished. On the importance of “recontextualizing” historically oral traditions that have become “decontextualized in social memory,” see the remarks of J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992), 75–86.

18. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989), also discusses the role of ritual performances and communal memories in reenacting, and in this way sustaining a connection to, the past. This perspective makes sense in cases where ritual and memory intersected in harmony. However, insofar as traditionists sensed a disjunction between their memories and actual practices, the rituals they observed served not so much to bring them closer to an imagined past as it did to alienate them from the present in which they lived.

19. For recent observations on the difficulties of relating texts and rituals, see Philippe Buc, “Text and Ritual in Ninth-Century Political Culture: Rome, 864,” in G. Althoff et al., *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography* (Cambridge, 2002), 123–138; and idem, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, N.J., 2001), 248–249, 259, and passim.

20. Joseph Schacht, “Law and Justice,” in *The Cambridge History of Islam,* vol. 2B, *Islamic Society and Civilization,* ed. P. M. Holt et al. (Cambridge, 1970), 549. This pronouncement about the distance between law and practice was based on little research. Schacht had no interest in ritual laws. His treatment of “Cult and Ritual” in *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence,* section 3.1, extends to seven lines, the rest of the chapter being devoted to “administrative” practices. See also his remarks on his interest in legal rules rather than ritual ordinances, in *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford, 1964), 1, 76, 112, 201. Baber Johansen, *Contingency in a Sacred Law* (Leiden, 1999), 33–72, portrays Schacht’s neglect of religious acts as part of a colonialist, Western bias in the scholarly approach to the law. Cf. Wael B. Hallaq, “From Fatwās to Furū‘: Growth and Change in Islamic Substantive Law,” *Islamic Law and Society* 1 (1994): 29–65. Hallaq criticizes N. J. Coulson for representing Islamic law as a “speculative system of religious thought, thoroughly imbued with idealistic norms” and developed in “isolation from practical needs and circumstances.” In contrast, Hallaq credits Schacht for demonstrating “the interconnectedness of the social and administrative practices” of the eighth century and for showing how Islamic law “emerged out of these practices.” Norman Calder criticized a tendency to draw a close relationship between law and practice. Without denying the existence of various links between these fields, he emphasized that Islamic law, especially as it emerged in multivolume postclassical works, was a deliberately complex, “mannerist” reflection on past tradition, with minimal relation to current practice. See his “Law,” in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London, 1996), 2:979–998. Ze’ev Maghen, “Dead Tradition: Joseph Schacht and the Origins of ‘Popular Practice,’” *Islamic Law and Society* 10 (2003): 276–347, endeavors to make sense of various of Schacht’s pronouncements on the relation of Islamic law to non-Muslim practices. He argues against Schacht (337) that “Islam embarked on an entirely independent jurisprudential journey … that saw the creation of unique problems, authentic solutions, indigenous outlooks and original methodologies” that did not derive from foreign law or practice.

21. Judith Tucker, “Gender and Islamic History,” in Michael Adas, ed., *Islamic and European Expansion: The Forging of a Global Order* (Philadelphia, 1993), 38.

22. For instance, with regard to the male positioning of women in the afterlife, see G. Juynboll, *Studies on the Origins,* chap. 6; Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad, “Women in the Afterlife: The Islamic View as Seen from the Qur’ān and Tradition,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43 (1975): 39–50.

23. D. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past,* 6–9, 57, 191–192.

24. Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies,* 2:210 and 366–369, recognized long ago that the category of *rijāl al-ḥadīth* (the “men who passed on the oral traditions”) included a good number of women. So it is strange that gender historians have chosen to ignore this aspect of the Oral Tradition. Sometimes the *isnād,* the chain of oral authorities, is composed entirely of women. Very many traditions may be categorized as of “mixed gender,” since their *isnād*s include both men and women.

25. See the letter quoted and analyzed by Yasin Dutton, *The Origins of Islamic Law: The Qur’an, the Muwaṭṭa’ and Madinan ‘Amal* (Richmond, Surrey, 1999), 37–38. Perhaps we should take this letter as representative of a Mālikite—but not necessarily Mālik’s—position.

26. Scholars of the rise of Islam have tended to emphasize either the Arabian (Ḥijāzī) or the extra-Arabian (Jewish, Christian, or provincial Roman) origins of Islam; see Christopher Melchert, “The Early History of Islamic Law,” in Herbert Berg, ed., *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Leiden, 2003), 293–324, at 299–300. Islam, as it emerged in Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean world, was by and large shaped by Judaism and Christianity. Yet it developed into far more than a calque of the other monotheistic traditions. It is indeed essential, in work sensitive to historical change, to appreciate the creative aspects of Muslims’ endeavor to establish a new religion in the garrison cities founded by the Arab conquerors.

1. Tombstones: Markers of Social and Religious Change, 650–800

1. *SFMA,* vol. 1, no. 1: *“Bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm, hādhā `l-qabr li-‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr al-Ḥajrī* [?]. *Allāhumma `ghfir lahu wa-adkhilhu* [al-janna?] *fī raḥma minka, wa-iyy[ā] nā ma‘ahu. Istaghfir lahu idhā quri’a hādhā `l-kit[ā] b wa-qul āmīn. Wa-kutiba hādhā `l-kit*[*ā*]*b fī Jum*[*ā*]*dā al-ākhir*[*a*] *min sanat* [*spelled with tā’ maftūḥa*] *ḥdā wa-thal*[*ā*]*thīn.”* The formula *“adkhilhu al-janna”* is rather common, so I have assumed an ellipsis; literally, the text may be translated as “let him enter into a state of mercy on your part.” On this tombstone, see H. El-Hawary, “The Most Ancient Islamic Monument Known Dated A.H. 31 (A.D. 652),” *JRAS* (1930): 321–333. The ancient Kufic writing style and certain orthographic peculiarities discussed by El-Hawary indicate that we have a remarkably early inscription at hand.

2. Y. Nevo et al., *Ancient Arabic Inscriptions from the Negev* (Jerusalem, 1993), 1:8, n. 20. Nevo mentions that other Egyptian tombstone texts began only in the 170s AH, a deduction he seems to have reached by consulting vol. 1 of *SFMA,* which skips from the year 31 to the year 174 AH. However, vol. 9 contains tombstones initially overlooked, dating from the years 71 and 111 AH.

3. The chapter includes an analysis of tombstones from the years 71, 102, and 111 AH. In addition, among early tombstones one may count a memorial embedded in the walls of a church in Cyprus that antedates ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s tombstone by two years. “In the name of God,” it reads, “this is the grave of ‘Urwa ibn Thābit, who died in the month of Ramaḍān of the year 29 of the Hijra,” or 650 by the Gregorian calendar *(Bismillāh, hādhā qabr ‘Urwa ibn Thābit tuwuffiya fī shahr Ramaḍān sanat*

tis'a wa-'ishrīn li`l-Hijra); see *RCEA,* vol. 1, no. 5. Explicit reference to the *Hijra* is odd in such an early inscription, and possibly an interpolation by the twelfth-century pilgrim who discovered it. On this pilgrim's narrative, see C. Schefer, "Aboul Hassan Aly El Herewy: Indications sur les lieux de Pèlerinage," *Archives de l'Orient Latin* 1 (1881): 590. In the context of early epitaphs, it is also worth mentioning a report pointing to a tombstone dated to 75 AH (694 CE), found among a cluster of Muslim tombs under the Arc of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli de Barbarie; see *RCEA,* no. 11. Ibn Shabba, cited below, reports on other first-century epitaphs for which we have no material evidence. On the antiquity of the 31 AH tombstone, see the article by El-Hawary, listed above.

4. Arguably, although the earliest dated references to the term would appear only several decades after 'Abd al-Raḥmān's death, this epitaph commemorated the death of a "Muslim." Possibly, however, it belonged to someone who self-identified as a *Muhājir* (Emigrant) or *a Mu'min* (Believer), and was identified by others (polemically) as a Son of Hagar. There is, in any case, no reason to assume a priori that every Muslim's epitaph was intended, in any deliberate way, as an "Islamic" memorial. Historians working on cognate fields have upheld this sort of distinction. Thus, for instance, Paul-Albert Février, "La mort chrétienne," *Segni e riti nella chiesa Altome-dievale Occidentale, 11–17 Aprile 1985,* in Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo, no. 33 (Spoletto, 1987), 2:881–942, aims to show how "la 'mort du chrétien' est devenue une 'mort chrétienne.'" Ross S. Kraemer, "Jewish Tuna and Christian fish: Identifying Religious Affiliation in Epigraphic Sources," *Harvard Theological Review* 84 (1991): 141–162, makes the point that inscriptions attributed to Jews should not necessarily count as Jewish.

5. Epitaphs and inscriptions have attracted almost exclusively the attention of epigraphists, not of historians. See, for example, the bibliography in *EI²,* s.v. "Kitābāt." Exceptionally, Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, N.J., 1998), 85–89, cites a number of early inscriptions in his discussion of early Islamic piety. Robert Hoyland, "The Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions," *JSAI* 21 (1997): 77–102, analyzes thematically an extensive corpus of inscriptions from the first two centuries of Islam yet his conclusion is very different from the one reached here regarding the possibility of using these sources as markers of religious change. The vast majority of epitaphs Werner Diem and Marco Schöller analyzed in their phenomenological study, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs,* do not date from the early Islamic period. Yūsuf Rāġib, "Les pierres de souvenir: stèles du Caire de la conquête arabe à la chute des Fatimides," *AI* 35 (2001): 321–383, offers a valuable discussion of Egyptian epitaphs, covering various themes ranging from decorative motifs to naming patterns. I thank Yūsuf Rāġib for sending me a copy of his article.

6. *RCEA* includes a number of third-century tombstones from non-Egyptian sites in the eastern Mediterranean world, dated by script to ca. 250 AH. Buṣrā in southern Syria, Homs in central Syria, and other unspecified sites in Syria are best represented. See vol. 1, no. 114 (ca. 200 AH); vol. 2, nos. 542–546 (ca. 250 AH), no. 675 (264 AH/877–878 CE). For early Islamic inscriptions from Syria, see also Solange Ory, *Cimetières et inscriptions du Ḥawrān et du Ğabal al-Durūz* (Paris, 1989), nos. 1, 8, 9. Ory plans to edit epitaphs from Buṣrā online, in a collection that will include two dozen tombstones from the first three centuries of Islam. Frédéric Imbert, "La nécropole de Qasṭal al-Balqā' en Jordanie," *Archéologie islamique* 3 (1992–1993): 17–59, includes a number of tombstones dated to the eighth and ninth centuries.

Mesopotamia, though a relatively developed region in early Islamic times, is not well represented in the tombstone record. The reason for the scarcity of tombstones here was the lack of stone in the alluvial plain. Muslims in Mesopotamia would need to engrave their memorials for the dead in clay, or import or recycle stone. This book often refers to the opinions of traditionists from Kūfa and Baṣra, but *RCEA* cites only one early Islamic tombstone from these cities, an epitaph dated to ca. 250 AH (vol. 2, no. 547).

Archaeologists have discovered a small number of early Islamic tombstones in the Arabian peninsula. In addition to the work of al-Faqīh on the epitaphs in the environs of ‘Asham (cited below), see Madeleine Schneider, “Stèles funéraires musulmanes du Yémen,” *REI 7* (1979); she dates the earliest tombstone (see 72–73) to 250–350 AH. Recently, a team of Saudi archaeologists discovered a tombstone with archaic Kufic script in Rabadhah, a waystation on the pilgrimage road from Kūfa to Mecca. They dated it rather tentatively (not altogether convincingly) to the turn of the first century of Islam. See Sa‘d al-Rāshid, *Al-Rabadhah: A Portrait of Early Islamic Civilisation in Saudi Arabia* (Riyadh, 1986), 87–88. A. Grohmann, *Expédition Philby-Rychmans-Lippens en Arabie,* part 2, *Textes Épigraphiques,* vol. 1, *Arabic Inscriptions* (Louvain, 1962), 4–41, includes a number of third-century AH epitaphs from the cemetery of ‘Ikrima near al-Ṭā’if. For other inscriptions in the area, see Ḥasan al-Bāshā, “Ahammiyyat shawāhid al-qubūr ka-maṣdar li-ta’rīkh al-jazīra al-‘arabiyya fī al-‘aṣr al-islāmī,” *Ta’rīkh al-Jazīrah al-‘Arabīyah,* vol. 1, part 1 (Riyadh, 1979), 81–126; Sa‘d al-Rāshid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya min Makka al-mukarrama* (Riyadh, 1995); idem, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr manshūra min “Ruwāwat” al-Madīna al-munawwara* (Riyadh, 1993); Moshalleh Moraekhi, “A Critical and Analytical Study of Some Early Islamic Inscriptions from Medina in the Ḥijāz, Saudi Arabia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Manchester, 1995); and Muhammad al-Salook, “Analytical and Paleographic Study of Some Early Kufic Inscriptions from Saoudi Arabia” (MA thesis, University of Durham, 1998). Finally, it is worth noting the Meccan epitaphs from the “Coll. G. Wiet,” an unpublished collection available for consultation through the *Thesaurus d’épigraphie islamique.* It includes a Meccan tombstone dated to 175 AH/791 CE; see fiche no. 14931.

7. On various uses of the term “popular” in reference to religion, see Jacques Berlinerblau, “Max Weber’s Useful Ambiguities and the Problem of Defining ‘Popular Religion,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2001): 605–626. J. Waardenburg, “Official and Popular Religion as a Problem in Islamic Studies,” in P. Vrijhof and J. Waardenburg, eds., *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies* (The Hague, 1977), 340–386, suggests that scholars distinguish between “normative,” “alternative,” and “popular” Islam. Frederick M. Denny, “Islamic Ritual: Perspectives and Theories,” *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* ed. R. Martin (Tucson, Ariz., 1985), 63–77, argues that the distinction between “official” and “popular” Islam is “in some respects a red herring.” In challenging the use of these terms Denny has a good point. Unfortunately, he does not explain by what terminology we might distinguish *‘ibādāt* (orthodox religious rites) from *bida‘* (practices classified as dangerous innovations). On the legal literature regarding ritual innovations, see Maribel Fierro, “The Treatises Against Innovations (*kutub al-bida‘*),” *Der Islam* 69 (1992): 204–246; and Boaz Shoshan, “High Culture and Popular Culture in Medieval Islam,” *Studia Islamica* 73 (1991): 89–94.

8. On the information that epitaphs provide about the deceased and his or her social background, see Werner Diem, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs,* vol. 1, *Epitaphs as Texts* (Wiesbaden, 2004), 9–114; the third volume, 166–167, includes an index of professions. For a sampling of original epitaphs, see al-Ghazālī, “Kitāb Dhikr al-mawt wa mā ba‘dahu,” in the author’s *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, n.d.), vol. 4, bk. 40, section 6. For an example of an eighth-or ninth-century tombstone with ornamentation, see Madeleine Schneider, *Stèles funéraires musulmanes des îles Dahlak (mer Rouge),* 2 vols. (Cairo, 1983), plate no. 2.

9. W. Diem, *Epitaphs as Texts,* 13–18, highlights a number of important relational expressions other than "son of" or "daughter of" that occur in late medieval tombstones (not in early Islamic ones). He notes, for instance, the identification of a freedman with his former master and of a wife with her husband. These identifications link a person of lower status to one of higher status: slave masters and husbands did not identify themselves in their epitaphs in relation to their slaves or their wives.

10. Rabīʿa's tombstone is cited below. Ibrāhīm's is in *SFMA,* vol. 9, no. 9775 (plate 1).

11. Covering the period from the third century BCE to the seventh century CE, see Jean-Baptiste Frey, *Corpus inscriptionum Iudaicarum,* vol. 2, *Asie-Afrique* (Rome, 1952), no. 1530, pp. 435–438; no. 1502, pp. 412–413; and no. 1539, p. 446. Two of these tombstones came from the Jewish cemetery of Tell el-Yehoudieh (Léontopolis); the third (1539) is of unknown provenance, but probably also from the same site. Most of the tombstones in the collection, these included, predate the rise of Islam by several centuries. For a more recent edition and critical discussion of the Egyptian epitaphs, see William Horbury and David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Cambridge, 1992); the three tombstones cited correspond to nos. 38, 78, and 40, respectively. Roman and Palestinian epitaphs also contain much information of relevance to the history of the Jewish family; see the analysis by Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J., 2001), 249–257. I thank Hayim Lapin for the last two references.

12. H. R. Hall, *Coptic and Greek Texts of the Christian Period from Ostraka, Stelae, etc. in the British Museum* (London, 1905), on Troisis, 6; on Ioh. annes, 4 (translation by Hall). On monks and their brothers, see Ibrahim Kamel, *Catalogue général des antiquités du Musée Copte, nos. 1–253: Coptic Funerary Stelae* (Cairo, 1987), 77–78, nos. 6566/95 (from Middle Egypt) and 8023/113 (from Abydos, Upper Egypt). For a general collection of Coptic tombstone inscriptions, see Monika R. M. Hasitzka, *Koptisches Sammelbuch,* in Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Neue Serie, 23 Folge (Vienna, 1993), 153–268. I thank Sebastian Richter of Universität Leipzig for this last reference and for sending me a copy of his unpublished article "Epigraphy, Coptic," forthcoming in the University of Missouri's *Encyclopaedia of Early Christian Art and Architecture.*

13. Department of Antiquities (Anon.), "Two New Inscriptions in Epigraphic South Arabian," *Atlal: The Journal of Saudi Arabian Archaeology* 6 (1982): 139–140, plate 124A; revisited by M. S. Gazdar, D. T. Potts, and A. Livingstone, "Excavations at Thaj," *Atlal: The Journal of Saudi Arabian Archaeology* 8 (1984): 88–90, no. 16 (undated epitaph). Cf. John Healey, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih* (Oxford, 1993), H16, 154ff. Frey's corpus of Jewish inscriptions also contains Arabian tombstones; see, for instance, 2:344–345, no. 1422. From Medain-Saleh, this tomb for Sh[ubaytu], his wife, and children, dating to 42 CE, mentions the name of the sculptor and claims proprietary rights to the tomb.

14. A. R. al-Ansary, *Qaryat al-Fau: A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilisation in Saudi Arabia* (Riyadh, 1982), 20, 47, 146.

15. Thus, see Han J. W. Drijvers and John F. Healey, *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osrhoene: Texts, Translations, and Commentary* (Leiden, 1999), AM3, AM4 ("The Family Portrait Mosaic"), AM5, and AM8.

16. Healey, *Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions,* H12, 137ff. This tombstone dates from the forty-third year of Ḥaretat, king of the Nabataeans (34–35 CE).

17. For the quotation, see W. Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London, 1985), article XII, 74. Similarly, see N. J. Coulson, *Succession in the Muslim Family* (Cambridge, 1971), 29–30. Cf. David Powers, *Studies in Qur'an and Ḥadīth: The Formation of the Islamic Law of Inheritance* (Berkeley, Calif., 1986),

chap. 1 and elsewhere. This book makes many valuable points on the shift from Qur'ānic to post-Qur'ānic laws.

18. *SFMA,* vol. 9, no. 3201. For a transcription and discussion, see H. el-Hawary, "The Second Oldest Islamic Monument Known Dated A.H. 71 (A.D. 691)," *JRAS* (1932): 289–293. There is some uncertainty about the reading of the name as "Jurayj ibn Sanad." Hoyland, "Content and Context," 87, no. 65, suggests the tombstone's date "should possibly" be understood as 171 AH (788 CE). He bases this suggestion in part on the fact that the phrase representing the death of Muḥammad as the greatest calamity "is not otherwise seen" until 190 AH (806 CE). However, the tombstone of 190 AH, which he cites by comparison (*SFMA,* vol. 1, no. 16), differs significantly from 'Abbāsa's tombstone in that it includes three Qur'ānic citations, 3:16 (= 3:18), 22:7, and 9:33, whereas 'Abbāsa's has none. In his article, el-Hawary argues for "great resemblance" in script between 'Abbāsa's tombstone and the famous monuments from 'Abd al-Malik's reign.

19. P. Crone's and M. Cook's *Hagarism* recognized the first redoubtable signs of Islamic self-expression in the numismatic and architectural evidence stemming from the reign of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik, during which 'Abbāsa died. On the 690s as a period of innovation in coins, see Michael L. Bates, "History, Geography, and Numismatics in the First Century of Islamic Coinage," *Revue suisse de numismatique* 65 (1986): 231–262; and Stuart D. Sears, "Before Caliphal Coins: Transitional Drahms of the Umayyad North," *American Journal of Numismatics* 15 (2003): 77–110. (I thank Stuart Sears for sending me a copy of his article.) On the architectural and archaeological break of the 690s, see Oleg Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton, N.J., 1996), 52–134; and Jeremy Johns, "Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years," *JESHO* 46 (2003): 411–436. In addition, see Chase F. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik* (Oxford, 2005), a highly accessible book that makes good use of material evidence to argue for the monumental transition of the 690s.

20. See Gaston Wiet, "Stèles Coufiques d'Égypte et du Soudan," *Journal Asiatique* 240 (1952): 273–297, at 279–286. Solange Ory, "Aspects religieux des textes épigraphiques du début de l'Islam," *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 58 (1990): 30–39, examines the appearance of the *basmala* and the *shahāda* as signs of Islamization in lands conquered by the Arabs.

21. 'Abd al-Raḥmān M. 'Abd al-Tawab, *Stèles islamiques de la nécropole d' Assouan,* 3 vols. (Paris, 1977–1986), vol. 1, no. 1.

22. *SFMA,* vol. 9, no. 3202.

23. Nevo, *Ancient Arabic Inscriptions,* 8–9. For recent views criticizing the revisionist chronology, see Harald Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'ān: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments," *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 1–34, and idem, *Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh,* 108–112. Also see Wadād al-Qāḍī, "The Impact of the Qur'ān on Arabic Literature During the Late Umayyad Period: The Case of 'Abd al-Ḥamīd's Epistolography," in G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader Shareef, eds., *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (London, 1993), 285–313; and Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'ān," *JAOS* 118 (1998): 1–14. Cf. Patricia Crone, "Two Legal Problems Bearing on the Early History of the Qur'ān," *JSAI* 18 (1994): 1–37. I take the occasion to thank Patricia Crone and Eli Alshech for comments challenging my earlier formulation on the relation of epitaphs to the Qur'ān.

24. John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977), x, 33–52, 78; idem, *Sectarian Milieu,* 14, 45, 48.

25. Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies,* 21, suggested that "variant traditions" present in the Qur'ān indicate the existence "of independent, possibly regional, traditions incorporated more or less intact into the canonical compilation, itself the product of

expansion and strife within the Muslim community.” According to this model, one would expect the tombstone record to illustrate how different regions subscribed to different, eventually canonized traditions. This is not what the record shows, however. It may reflect the existence of regional variants, as in the case of Qur’ān 33:56 at ‘Asham (discussed subsequently), but these variants were not incorporated into the ‘Uthmānic text.

26. Antonin Jaussen, *Mission archéologique en Arabie: mars-mai 1907* (Paris, 1922), 3:100–102: *ighfir lahu dhanbahu mā taqaddama minhu wa-mā ta’akhkhara.* Cf. *li-yaghfira laka `llāhu mā taqaddama min dhanbika wa-mā ta’akhkhara,* in Qur’ān 48:2. On Qur’ānic graffiti, see the preliminary study by Frédéric Imbert, “Le Coran dans les graffiti des deux premiers siècles de l’Hégire,” *Arabica* 47 (2000): 381–390.

27. For a straightforward discussion of the issue, see Michael Cook, *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2000), 120–122.

28. Hasan al-Faqīh, *Mawāqi’ athariyya Tihāma,* vol. 1, *Mikhlāf ‘Asham* (Riyadh, 1992), 353, 388, cf. 361; editor’s discussion on 331–333. The collection includes one dated tombstone from 157 AH (774 CE) that should serve as a control (see 360). Al-Faqīh dates the tombstones either to the first or to the second century of the Islamic era, but this division does not seem justified. A few of the tombstones he ascribes to the first century may well belong to the middle of the second and those he ascribes to the second may well belong to the beginning of the third. This variant of Qur’ān 33:56 does not correspond to any established variant reading *(qirā’a)* recorded by Ibn Mujāhid (d. 935), *Kitāb al-sab‘a fī al-qirā’āt* (Cairo, 1972), 518–524. Nevertheless, variant readings of this verse did exist; see Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur’an* (Leiden, 1937), 76, 262, 298. Cf. the citations of Qur’ān 33:56 in *SFMA,* vol. 1, nos. 14 and 24.

29. *SFMA,* vol. 1, no. 3.

30. Thus, out of a total of eighty-three Qur’ānic citations from the tombstone record of Aswān in the years 721–870, corresponding to vol. 1 of ‘Abd al-Tawab, *Stèles islamiques,* there are forty citations to Qur’ān 9:33 and thirty to Qur’ān 22:7. In *SFMA,* vol. 1, devoted to the years 790–854, the three verses most frequently cited are Qur’ān 9:33, 22:7, and 3:16 (= 3:18). Citations to Qur’ān 9:33 and 22:7 often appear on the same tombstone.

31. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān,* 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1954–1968), at Qur’ān 9:33, for this and other slightly divergent interpretations; Hūd ibn Muḥakkam, *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘Azīz* (Beirut, 1990), 2:127–128.

32. The haphazard record of Egyptian tombstones from the seventh and eighth centuries does not provide data of any use for cliometric research into conversion trends. On the conversion of Egypt to Islam, see Ira Lapidus, “The Conversion of Egypt to Islam,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 248–262; and Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, 1979), chap. 8. See also Jonathan M. Bloom, “The Mosque of the Qarafa in Cairo,” *Muqarnas* 4 (1987): 7–20, at 12.

33. The most dramatic comparison can be drawn between the course of Qur’ān 9:33 and 112 at Aswān. In the middle of the ninth century (ca. 820–ca. 870), Qur’ān 9:33 was the more popular of two extremely popular verses, earning almost 50 percent of all citations. By the first half of the tenth century (ca. 910–ca. 950), Qur’ān 9:33 had declined in popularity to under 5 percent of citations. In the same timeframes, Qur’ān 112 jumped from zero citations to being the most popular verse, but winning with only 20 percent of the total number of citations. A similar contrast can be drawn between Qur’ān 22:7 and 41:30. These observations are based on a comparison of citations from vol. 1 and vol. 3 of ‘Abd al-Tawab, *Stèles islamiques. SFMA,* vol. 4, shows that Qur’ān 3:16 (= 3:18), 9:33, and 22:7 remained popular in the years 885–927, yet began to face serious competition from Qur’ān 67:1–2 and

112.

34. There is no reason to expect that *qara'a* designated silent reading except where specified otherwise. See, for instance, Abū Ghānim, *al-Mudawwana al-kubrā* (Beirut, 1974), 1:210; he quotes Abū 'Ubayda (ibn al-Jarrāḥ, d. 639), who recommended that one read the Qur'ān in the funerary prayer, but "inwardly" (*baynaka wa-bayna nafsika*). Similarly, according to al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 933), Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 742) reported on the authority of Abū Umāma ibn Sahl ibn Ḥunayf (d. 718): "One of the Prophet's Companions related to him that the *sunna* in the funeral prayer was for the Imam to praise God, then to read the *Fātiḥa* privately to himself" (*sirran fī nafsihi*). On this, see Ibn Rushd (Averroës), *Bidāyat al-mujtahid wa nihāyat al-muqtaṣid* (Beirut, 1996), 3: KJ, 35–36; cf. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf,* 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1983), 3: KJ, no. 6428. The norm at funerary prayers was to recite the Qur'ān audibly. Recent scholarship on the Qur'ān has emphasized the importance of liturgical recitation. In this regard, see A. Neuwirth's work, cited below; William A. Graham, "The Earliest Meaning of 'Qur'ān,'" *Die Welt des Islams* 23–24 (1984): 361–377; idem, "Qur'an as Spoken Word: An Islamic Contribution to the Understanding of Scripture," *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* ed. R. Martin (Tucson, Ariz., 1985), 23–40; idem, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge, 1987), 79–115; and Asma Asfaruddin, "The Excellencies of the Qur'ān: Textual Sacrality and the Organization of Early Islamic Society," *JAOS* 122 (2002): 1–24.

35. On the participation of the illiterate in a culture of literacy, in different contexts, see Roger Chartier, "Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France," in Steven Kaplan, ed., *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Berlin, 1984), 241ff; and David Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions," *Helios* 21 (1994): 196ff.

36. Direct "appeals to the living" also feature on Coptic tombstones, as discussed by Richter in "Epigraphy, Coptic." They appear also with some frequency in Jewish epitaphs; see, for instance, the appeal for a stranger to weep at "this hateful tomb as my bridal chamber" in Horbury and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions,* no. 31.

37. Donner, *Narratives,* 86, cites an inscription dated to 64/684: "Lord of Gabriel and Michael and Isrāfīl, grant forgiveness to Thābit ibn Yazīd al-Ash'arī for his past and future sins." Hoyland, "Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions," 89, cites a Greek formula used in Jordan during the sixth and seventh centuries: *Kyrie synchôrêson tas [h]amartias autou* ("O Lord forgive his sins."). Nevo, *Ancient Arabic Inscriptions,* 8–9, has discussed later versions of this formula. He claims it is commonplace, monotheistic fare, rather than a Qur'ānic paraphrase, but does not cite Jewish or Christian inscriptions containing the *topos* of early/late sins. These examples may count as praying for forgiveness for oneself rather than for others, unless we assume individual Muslims wrote them in the hopes that other Muslims would read them and pray on their behalf. Epitaphs can be associated more readily than graffiti with the institution of seeking divine forgiveness for others because they were—in all cases that specify the date of death—at least partially written by a living person on behalf of the dead. The qualification here stems from the fact that individuals occasionally composed their own epitaphs before death; on "testamentary" epitaphs, see Marco Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs,* vol. 2, *Epitaphs in Context* (Wiesbaden, 2004), 328–329.

38. See, for instance, the liturgical language used in 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6067, 6419, 6424, 6459, and 6461; no. 6459 is the most pertinent reference in view of the examples given from the epitaphs. Ibn Abī Shayba recorded that Mujāhid used to say: "In the name of God and in his path, O God make his grave spacious, and bring to him light in it [*nawwir lahu fīhi*], and make him adhere to his

Prophet." On this, see al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr bi sharḥ ḥāl al-mawtā wa al-qubūr* (Damascus and Beirut, 1989), 153. For a useful index of formulas on epitaphs, see M. Schneider, *Stèles funéraires musulmanes des îles Dahlak,* 478–479.

39. Cook, *The Koran,* 79, 142, distinguishes between "liturgical" and what he calls "semi-liturgical" uses of the Qur'ān, depending on whether or not the recitations took place in the ritual of prayer. One may refer to the "liturgical" function of the Qur'ān at the cemetery, yet the reader should bear in mind that from a certain perspective, this use of the Qur'ān would appear "quasi-liturgical" in that it did not form part of the prescribed form of service at the cemetery. On the potential liturgical function of Meccan verses before canonization of the Qur'ān and on the subsequent loss of this function, see Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin, 1981), 263, 316, and passim; and idem, "Du texte de récitation au canon en passant par la liturgie," *Arabica* 47 (2000): 194–229. Our focus is not on the liturgical role of Qur'ānic logia prior to canonization, but afterward. In the eighth century, when Muslim scripture had already reached standard form, it began to serve a novel ritual function in various cemeteries throughout the Islamic world. This development is our concern.

40. Mālik ibn Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭa'* (Beirut, 1996), I: KJ, no. 611, related from Nāfi' that 'Abdallāh ibn 'Umar "was not accustomed to reciting [the Qur'ān] during the prayer over the bier" *(kāna lā yaqra'u fi `l-ṣalāt 'ala `l-janāza).* Unless otherwise indicated, citations to Mālik's *Muwaṭṭa'* refer to the standard recension by Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā al-Laythī al-Andalusī. See also Mālik, *al-Muwaṭṭa',* recension by Suwayd ibn Sa'īd al-Ḥadathānī (Beirut, 1994), KJ, 315. Also on Mālik's authority, Saḥnūn, *al-Mudawwana al-kubrā li-imām Mālik* (Cairo, 1905; repr. Beirut, n.d.), I: KJ, 174, declares there is no reciting (of the Qur'ān) "over the bier." Abū Ḥanīfa's position, in agreement with Mālik's, is reported by al-Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa d'al-Imām Mālik,* 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1979), KJ, 111, no. 311. In Ibn Abī Zayd, *Kitāb al-Nawādir wa al-ziyādāt 'alā mā fī al-Mudawwana* (Beirut, 1999), 1: KJ, 542, 591, Ibn Ḥabīb quotes from Mālik: "There is no reading over the bier in the practice of our town" *(mimmā yu'malu bihi bi-baladinā).* Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Al-Kāfī fī fiqh ahl al-madīnah al-Mālikī* (Beirut, 1987), KJ, 84, declares there is no reading of the Qur'ān in the funerary prayer according to Mālik, yet reports that some of Medina's magnates *(kubarā' ahl al-Madina)* did recite the introduction to the Qur'ān after the first *takbīrd.* Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* ed. M. Khan (Riyadh, 1997), 2: KJ, chap. 56 *(sunnat al-ṣalāt 'ala `l-janā'iz),* clarifies that the funerary prayer has neither bowing *(rukū')* nor prostration *(sujūd),* "and there is no utterance during it" *(wa-lā yutakallamu fīhā);* cf. chap. 65 *(qirā'at fātiḥat al-kitāb 'ala `l-janāza).* Ibn Rushd (Averroës), *Bidāydt al-Mujtahid,* KJ, 32–33, mentions two reasons for scholars' disagreement about Qur'ānic recitations at the funeral prayer: first, a discrepancy between tradition *(athar)* and practice *('amal);* second, the question about whether or not "funerary prayer" belongs to the category of "prayer," in which recitation is acceptable. On divergence among jurists, see al-Tūsī, *Al-Khilāf (Qum,* 1987–1997), 1: KJ, 723; and Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Muḥallā* (Cairo, 1928–34), 5: KJ, 129–131, no. 574. This legal discussion concerns the funerary prayer, not intercessions delivered on various occasions after burial.

41. Al-Shāfi'ī, *Mawsū'at al-imām al-Shāfi'ī: al-kitāb al-umm* (Beirut, 1996), 2: KJ, 381; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6427; and al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmi' al-kabīr* (Beirut, 1996), 2: KJ, chap. 39, 1026. Al-Tirmidhī; reports that several of the *ahl al-'ilm,* including al-Thawrī and some of the Kūfans, opposed this reading.

42. Al-Ghazālī, "Kitāb Dhikr al-mawt wa mā ba'dahu," in *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn,* book 40, section *6,* reports that Ibn Ḥanbal considered recitation of the Qur'ān as an innovation, yet concludes there is no harm in the practice. See Ibn Ḥanbal, *Masā'il al-*

Imām, redaction by Isḥāq al-Nīsābūrī (Beirut, 1974), KJ, no. 946, cf. 931; Abū Bakr al-Khallāl, *Al-Amr bi al-mā‘rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar* (Cairo, 1975), 187–191. On the distinction between reading and reciting by the tomb, see Ibn Ḥanbal, *Masā’il al-Imām,* redaction by ‘Abdallāh ibn Aḥmad (Beirut, 1981), KJ, nos. 543–544. I think Christopher Melchert for this last reference. See Christopher Melchert, “Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Qur’an, “*The Journal of Qur’anic Studies 6* (2004): 26–27.

43. Al-Khallāl, *Al-Amr bi al-ma‘rūf* 188; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍū‘āt min al-aḥādīth al-marfū‘āt* (Riyadh, 1997), “Kitāb al-Qubūr,” chap. 11, 1784; al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr,* 152, 197. See also Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians,* 5th ed. (New York, 1973), 513, 517, 525, and passim; and Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (New York, 1995), 23–24.

44. Cf. Waṣīyat Abī Ḥanīfa, art. 20, and Fiqh Akbar II, art. 21, as cited in A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge, 1932), 129, 195.

45. These formulas also appear on Jordanian tombstones, with slight variations; see F. Imbert, “La nécropole de Qasṭal al-Balqā’ en Jordanie.” Ibn Shāhīn related a *ḥadīth* that the prophet Muḥammad used to say, with respect to the punishment in the grave by the angels: “Learn your proof, for you will be asked” *(ta‘allamū ḥujjatakum fa-innakum mas’ūlū;n).* For this quotation, see al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr,* 195. The specific formula *“laqqinhu ḥujjatahu”* occurs rarely in funerary liturgy. But Shī‘ite lawbooks do include it as part of funerary prayers, and associate it directly with the punishment in the grave by Munkar and Nakīr. See al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām fī sharḥ al-muqni‘a,* 2nd ed. (Al-Najaf 1959), 3:330; Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al faqīh,* 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1992), 1: chap. 25, p. 205, no. 47/500; and p. 206, no. 48/501. Similarly, see the attestation in the Mālikite work of Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 643. The formula on bringing light to the grave is commonplace and probably has its roots in the Roman and Christian prayers for *lux perpetua* in the afterlife. On the various eschatological concepts that appear in medieval Muslim tombstones, see W. Diem, *Epitaphs as Texts,* 115–207.

46. On the subject, see chap. 7, pp. 201, 213, and 221, of this volume.

47. Note the qualitative change between ‘Abbāsa’s and Rabī‘a’s *maghfira:* only the latter relates explicitly to beliefs in the continuation of life in the grave. An interesting variant on the plea for forgiveness ends with the qualification *ḥayyan wa-mayyitan,* “while living and while dead.” Nevo, *Ancient Arabic Inscriptions,* 8, consistently transliterates the latter term as *“mayyt-an”* and translates the phrase as “as long as he lives and until his death.” Such an odd translation is justified, in his view, because the concept of “forgiveness after death” makes sense only if we assume that Muslims from the Negev had developed a belief in the Resurrection or in the Last Judgment by the Umayyad period! In fact, the last part of the formula probably refers to the Muslim belief in the need for forgiveness during *al-barzakh,* the period between death and the resurrection corresponding to the “punishment in the grave.”

48. See *SFMA,* vol. 1, no. 4; and M. Schneider, *Stèles funéraires musulmanes des îles Dahlak,* 59, 60, 69.

49. For one of the earliest references to the punishment of the grave, see the poem by Jarīr (d. ca. 728), in chap. 7, p. 218, below. For an early incorporation of this dogma in a death ritual, see the funeral prayer associated with Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyab, in chap. 7, p. 229. Also see Ibn Qutayba’s early defense of this dogma, in chap. 7, p. 218.

50. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-mawt wa-Kitāb al-qubūr,* reconstructed from quotations by Leah Kinberg (Haifa, 1983), 73–74, nos. 8–11. This reference to the

"invocation of the living" does not directly connect the ritual to tombstones. William Graham, "Islam in the Mirror of Ritual," in R. Hovannisian and S. Vryonis, eds., *Islam's Understanding of Itself* (Malibu, Calif., 1983), 53–71, describes "orthoprax" Islam as a ritualistic religion with a "reformational" cast that entails a rejection of sacramental practices. This characterization does not apply to popular Muslim rituals imbued with magical efficacy, such as intercessions for the dead. These rituals developed despite the "anti-sacramental" emphasis of traditionist Islam.

51. At the end of the *Kitāb al-Qubūr,* 101–103, nos. 113ff, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā includes a number of unusual specimens. On epitaphs in Arabic literature, see M. Schöller, *Epitaphs in Context,* 315ff. Often, epitaphs include poems instead of Qur'ānic quotations; note, for instance, the poems of the tombstones of Kairouan analyzed in W. Diem, *Epitaphs as Texts,* 559–574. For a sense of regional variety in later tombstones, see Louis Bazin, "Persistances préislamiques et innovations dans les stèles funéraires ottomanes," in Gilles Veinstein, ed., *Les Ottomans et la mort* (Leiden, 1996), 19–38; and I. D. Mortensen, "Women After Death: Aspects of a Study on Iranian Nomadic Cemeteries," in Bo Utas, ed., *Women in Islamic Societies: Social Attitudes and Historical Perspectives* (London, 1983), 26–47.

52. Al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan* (Beirut, 1995), 4: KJ, no. 2027; Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan,* (Beirut, 1998), KJ, nos. 3225–3226; Ibn Māja, *Sunan* (Cairo, 1998), 2: KJ, chap. 43, no. 1563 (on Jābir's authority); al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā* (Hyderabad, 1925–1937), 4: KJ, 4; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi',* KJ, no. 1052, replaces Sulaymān ibn Mūsā with Abū al-Zubayr; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Mustadrak,* KJ, 525, nos. 1369 and 1370, does the same yet records different authorities preserving the tradition from Ibn Jurayj. Typically, the subject under consideration is subsumed under oral traditions prohibiting the plastering of graves *(tajṣīṣ al-qubūr).* However, 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6488, Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Beirut, 1995), 3: KJ, chap. 32 *(al-nahy 'an tajṣīṣ al-qabr wa `l-binā' 'alayhi),* and Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad,* 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1994), nos. 14571 and 26617–26618, among others, mention plastering while passing over in silence the question of writing. This last work is normally cited according to the number of the tradition, without indicating the volume. Atypically, Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 334–335, includes a heading on the writing on tombstones for identification purposes *(fi `l-qabr yuktabu wa-yu'allamu 'alayhi).* Here Ibn Abī Shayba includes a tradition that Ibn Jurayj ascribed to Abū al-Zubayr, mentioning only the prohibition against building on graves, followed by Sulaymān ibn Mūsa's addendum concerning tombstone inscriptions.

53. Al-Mizzī, *Tuḥfat al-ashrāf bi ma'rifat al-aṭrāf* (Beirut, 1999), 2:233–234, 12:344–345, comments that Sulaymān could not have heard a tradition from Jābir; the *ḥadīth* therefore counts as *mursal* (incompletely transmitted). See also Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* (Beirut, 1996), 2:111–112. With Abū al-Zubayr in the chain of transmission, the *ḥadīth* would count as *musnad* (a tradition with uninterrupted ascription going all the way back to the prophet Muḥammad). In versions that substitute Abū al-Zubayr instead of Sulayman, we may see a process of *tadlīs,* defined by Juynboll as "tampering with *isnāds* to make them appear more reliable." Ibn Jurayj, the "common link" in this set of traditions, was "infamous" for resorting to this practice, according to G. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition,* 180. Compare Juynboll to Harald Motzki, *Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh,* 185 and 278 (for a reassessment of *tadlīs),* 234–238 and passim (for arguments in favor of the authenticity of Ibn Jurayj's traditions), 78, 232–233, and 241 (on transmission from Sulaymān ibn Mūsā to Ibn Jurayj), and 78, 208–211, and 289–290 (on transmission from Abū al-Zubayr to Ibn Jurayj). I thank Harald Motzki for helpful comments on an earlier formulation.

54. Talmud Yerushalmi, Shekalim, 2:6/4, 47a, as it appears in *Synopse zum*

Talmud Yerushalmi, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans-Jürgen Becker (Tübingen, 2001). Both the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971–1972), s.v. “Tombs and Tombstones” and “Epitaphs,” and *The Jewish Encyclopedia,* new ed. (New York, 1925), s.v. “Tombstones,” refer to Talmud Yerushalmi, Shek. 2:7, 47a, but the quotation in question is at the location specified above. See also *Bereschit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar,* ed. J. Theodor (Berlin, 1912–1936), 82:10; *BT Horoyoth* 13b. Fortunately, say the rabbis, drinking water left over from kneading bread restores one’s learning.

55. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 334–335. On the prohibition against brick, see Ibn Qudāma, *Al-Mughnī* (Cairo, 1987), 3: KJ, 439. On ‘Umar II’s posthumous reputation, see J. Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence,* 192.

56. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 334–335. On al-Qāsim’s other front against writing, see Michael Cook, “Opponents of the Writing of Tradition,” 462, 472, and 503 in particular.

57. Both in Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 334–335.

58. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6497. Note the alternative wording of this tradition—namely, the use of *taqṣīṣ* instead of the standard *tajṣīṣ* and of *taklīl* instead of the standard *binā’.*

59. By the same logic, the Muslim tombstone from 652 makes it not unreasonable to believe that opposition to tombstone inscriptions might have begun concomitantly, roughly a quarter of a century after the death of the prophet Muḥammad. *Ḥadīth* criticism would not lend support to this belief, however, given that the *isnād* of Sulaymān ibn Mūsā’s tradition is *mursal;* no link exists, in other words, between the tradition and one of the Prophet’s Companions.

60. A search for Medinese tombstones from the first three centuries of Islam yielded none. Consulted in this research was Janine Sourdel-Thomine, ed., *Index Géographique du Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie arabes* (Cairo, 1975); and the CD-ROM of the Fondation Max van Berchem: *Thesaurus d’épigraphie islamique,* directed by Ludvik Kalus, 3e livraison (Paris and Geneva, 2001).

61. See Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *Al-Bayān wa al-taḥṣīl* (Beirut, 1984), 2: KJ, 220–221, where the opinion is attributed to Mālik, though on the basis of a quotation from Ibn al-Qāsim, who does not himself cite the master. Mālik, *al-Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, both in Yaḥyā’s and in Suwayd’s recensions, mentions neither the topic of plastering nor inscribing. According to Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 189, Mālik abhorred plastering and building upon graves. Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 652–653, cites the ‘Utbiyya manuscript representing Mālik abhorring building or stacking up stones at the grave and Ibn al-Qāsim’s independent abhorrence for writing on tombstones.

62. Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 189. This section on the plastering of graves does not specify anything about writing.

63. See, e.g., the sharp formulation of the Ḥanafite jurist al-Kāsānī, *Kitāb al-badā’i‘ al-ṣanā’i‘ fī tartīb al-sharā’i‘* (Pakistan, 1989), 1:320.

64. Ibid., 320. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-athār* (Beirut, n.d.), 84, no. 420.

65. Ibn al-Ḥajj, *Al-Madkhal* (Cairo, 1929), 3:274.

66. For a poignant description of the cemetery’s demolition, see Eldon Rutter, *The Holy Cities of Arabia* (London, 1928), 2:256–258.

67. Ibn Shabba, *Ta’rīkh al-Madīnah al-munawwarah* (Beirut, 1996), 1:68–69, nos. 315, 318; alternative edition (Qum, 1989–1990), 1:101–102. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf* KJ, 334–335, with Abū Bakr al-Ḥanafī relating from Kathīr ibn Zayd (d. ca. 775), on the authority of al-Muṭṭalib ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Ḥanṭab. On ‘Uthmān ibn Maz‘ūn, see Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 3: pt. 1, 286–291.

68. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3275–3276, on how he observed the rulers destroy graves in Mecca that nobody claimed in ownership. He reports that no jurist censured

this act. In the same chapter, KJ, no. 3289, al-Shāfiʿī mentions Muhammad's curse on the Jews and Christians who adopted the graves of their prophets as mosques: "Let neither religion remain in the land of the Arabs." On legal opposition to tomb structures, see Thomas Leisten, "Between Orthodoxy and Exegesis: Some Aspects of Attitudes in the Shariʿa Toward Funerary Architecture," *Muqarnas* 7 (1990): 12–22. Yūsuf Rāġib, "Les premiers monuments funéraires de l'Islam," *AI* 9 (1970): 27, mentions that Shīʿites accused Hārūn al-Rashīd of demolishing al-Ḥusayn's *mashhad.*

69. Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rīkh al-Madīnah* (Beirut, 1996) 1:79–80, nos. 359 and 360; alternative edition (Qum, 1989–1990), 1:120. For the identification of Muḥammad as a son of the famous Zayd ibn ʿAlī, see Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿArab* (Cairo, 1962), 58. It is unlikely that ʿAqīl would have discovered Umm Ḥabība's tombstone, given that he died shortly after she did.

70. Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rīkh al-Madīnah* (Beirut, 1996), 1:382, 86; alternative edition (Qum, 1989–1990), 1:132.

71. Al-Nuʿmān, *Daʿā'im,* KJ, 238.

72. Al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq, *Kitāb al-aḥkām fī al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām* (N.p., 1990), 2: KJ, 166.

73. Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Kitāb al-baḥr al-zakhār al-jāmiʿli-madhāhib ʿulamā'al-amṣār,* 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1975), 3: KJ, 131–132. On the margins of this work the commentator clarifies that the Prophet had not placed a written mark on Ibn Maẓʿūn's grave, but simply a rock. Nevertheless, he justifies inscriptions by analogical reasoning.

74. Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Istibṣār* (Beirut, 1991), KJ, no. 768. See also al-Kulaynī, *al-Furūʿ min al-kāfī* (Teheran, 1957), 3: KJ, 202, no. 3; note the use of "in the grave" rather than "on the grave." Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtalaf al-Shīʿa* (Qum, 1992), 2:315, shows divergence in Twelver Shīʿite views regarding building on graves, but does not mention tombstone inscriptions.

75. Rāġib, "Les pierres de souvenir," 322–323, includes a short but useful discussion on Sunni laws regarding epitaphs. It does not mention Shīʿite views.

76. Al-Ḥattāb, *Mawāhib al-jalīl li-sharḥ mukhtaṣar Khalīl* (Tripoli, Libya, 1969), 2:243. Al-Ramlī, *Nihāyat al-muḥtāj ilā sharḥ al-minhāj fī al-fiqh ʿalā madhhab al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī* (Cairo, 1967), 3:34, considers it acceptable to engrave the deceased's name in case of need.

77. Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā,* KJ, 133, no. 577.

78. Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Mustadrdk,* KJ, no. 1370.

79. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿĀriḍat al-aḥwadhī bi sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī* (Beirut, 1997), vol. 4, comment on chap. 58, *Ḥadīth* 1052, 216–217. As precedent for this opinion, Ibn al-ʿArabī cites al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's concession to daubing graves with clay. See also al-Ḥaṭṭāb, 247, and al-Wansharīsī, *al-Miʿyār al-muʿrib wa al-jāmīʿ al-mughrib ʿan fatāwā ʿulamā' Ifrīqiya wa al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib* (Beirut, 1981), 1:318.

80. Al-Wansharīsī, *al-Miʿyār,* 1:317–319, and 9:394–396.

81. Al-Ramlī, *Nihāydt al-muḥtāj,* 3:34. For the identification of this al-Adhraʿī, see *GAL,* Supplement, 1:680, no. 6, and Supplement, 2:108, no. 16a; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya* (Hyderabad, 1979), 3: no. 678, 190–194. I thank members of Midale East Medievalists, a scholarly discussion network, for answering my query regarding the identity of al-Adhraʿī.

82. Ibn al-Ḥajj, *al-Madkhal,* 3:273. In addition, see Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamā's *fatwa* on epitaphs, translated by M. Schöller, *Epitaphs in Context, 273–275.*

83. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Popular Religious Beliefs and the Late Roman Historians," in his *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Midaletown, Conn., 1977), 148, 150, and 155–156, argued against any "clear separation" between upper-

and lower-class Christian culture in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Similarly, in *The Cult of the Saints,* 12–22, Peter Brown effectively criticized the “two tiered” model of religious history that separated the views of an enlightened minority from the religion of “the vulgar.” For Momigliano, this “Christian abolition of the internal frontiers between the learned and the vulgar” implied in part that “cultured persons” had accepted “unsophisticated beliefs.” The early Islamic case seems radically different, in light of tombstone inscriptions, for three reasons. First, epitaphs display a sophisticated belief system. Second, the traditionist discourse divides not the learned from the vulgar, but sound practices from innovative ones. Third, instead of abolishing frontiers, traditionists created them. Their views cannot be dismissed as a product of eighteenth-century rationalism. That said, it is important not to adopt uncritically the traditionist scheme of separation, which must be recognized as a construct.

2. Washing the Corpse in Arabia and Mesopotamia

1. Ibn Isḥāq, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya,* recension by Ibn Hishām, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1955), 2:662; see 656 on Abū Bakr’s application of Qur’ān 3:144 to Muh. ammad’s actual death.

2. Charles Pellat, *Le milieu baṣrien et la formation de Ğaḥiẓ* (Paris, 1953), 239ff and 243ff, is insightful on the discursive cleavage between private and public life. See also Franz Rosenthal, “Fiction and Reality: Sources for the Role of Sex in Medieval Muslim Society,” in A. al-Sayyid-Marsot, ed., *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam* (Malibu, Calif., 1979), 3–22.

3. Thierry Bianquis, “The Family in Arab Islam,” in *A History of the Family,* vol. 1, *Distant Worlds, Ancient Worlds* (Harvard, 1996), 603–610. For a fanciful treatment of “la vie intime des epoux,” see G.-H. Bousquet, *L’Éthique sexuelle de l’Islam* (Paris, 1966), chap. 9. On sexuality and the idea of a sacred boundary, see Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *La Sexualité en Islam* (Paris, 1975). Basim Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam* (Cambridge, 1983), deals with the rules on contraception and abortion.

4. A similar concern gave rise to the legal debate on the light under which a potential buyer ought to examine a slave girl’s body. In “The Valorization of the Human Body in Muslim Sunni Law,” in D. Stewart et al., eds., *Law and Society in Islam* (Princeton, N.J., 1996), 71–112, Baber Johansen discusses the rules of this “symbolic or social exchange” at play in commercial transactions involving human commodities. The case of a corpse is analogous to that of a slave girl in that both are human but with accidental qualities compromising their ability to restrain others from handling their bodies. On the emphasis placed by modern Islamic law on protecting the corpse, and by extension the grave, see the illuminating study by Birgit Krawietz, *Die Ḥurma: Schariatrechtlicher Schutz vor Eingriffen in die körperliche Unversehrtheit nach arabischen Fatwas des 20. Jahrhunderts.* (Berlin, 1991), pt. 4, 116–168. On conceptions of privacy in Islamic law, see also Eli Alshech, “‘Do not enter houses other than your own’: The Evolution of the Notion of a Private Domestic Sphere in Early Sunnī Islamic Thought,” *Islamic Law and Society* 11 (2004): 291–332.

5. As informants Ibn Isḥāq names ‘Abdallāh ibn Abī Bakr (ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Amr ibn Ḥazm, d. ca. 750) and Ḥusayn ibn ‘Abdallāh (ibn ‘Ubaydallāh ibn al-‘Abbās). Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk (Annales)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879–1901), I:4, 1830, mentions Kathīr ibn ‘Abdallāh instead of Ḥusayn ibn ‘Abdallāh. This work is cited first by series, then by volume. Madelung, *Succession to Muḥammad,* 26–27,

ascribes the account to Ibn ʻAbbās and describes it as "distinctly pro-Hashimite." He suggests it "provoked ʻĀ'isha to give a counter-report" against "Muḥammad's insensitive and quarrelsome kin." Note, however, that the first account is not attributed to Ibn ʻAbbās but to one of his descendants (among others), and ʻĀ'isha's account does not address any Hashimites.

6. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra, 2:662.*

7. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra,* 2:656. On Muḥammad's death and the end of revelation *(waḥy),* see Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 65, no. 1627.

8. Zayd ibn ʻAlī (attrib.), *Majmūʻ al-fiqh* (Milan, 1919), 2: KJ, 79, mentions only ʻAlī by name among the corpse washers. See al-Nuʻmān, *Daʻā'im,* KJ, 228; and al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 150, no. 2. Cf. Ibn Saʻd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 2, pt. 2, 61–63, where Muḥammad curses with blindness anyone venturing to inspect the *ʻawra* of his corpse. Unfortunately, if Muḥammad was not buried in his long shirt, as Muslim tradition holds (Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, no. 596), then he was at some point stripped naked.

9. The Muslims who lived through the ʻAbbasid revolution would easily have remarked that, on the occasion of Muḥammad's death, ʻAlī led ʻAbbās and his sons in harmony.

10. W. Madelung, *Succession to Muḥammad,* 356–360. See A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (Oxford, 1955), xiii, xxii–xxiv, and xxxiv, on how Ibn Isḥāq glorified ʻAlī and reported traditions in favor of Shīʻite claims. See A. Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition,* 8, on Ibn Isḥāq's transmission of pro-Iraqi traditions.

11. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra,* 2:651 and 649. The diagnosis might have appeared polemical due to the etymological connection between *janb* and *junub* or *janāba,* which refer to major ritual impurity. According to al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh,* I:4, 1809, Muḥammad declared in response to the concern that he would get pleurisy, "But it comes from the devil, and God would not give it power over me." Eventually, Muslim tradition would grant martyrdom by proxy to all those dying of pleurisy. The quotation on ʻĀ'isha's distinction is from D. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past,* 31.

12. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra,* 2:654–655.

13. See Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, 1979), chap. 5, on how scripture achieves "an effect of the real" by "emphasizing the peculiarity of the situation."

14. Ibn Saʻd. *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 1, pt. 2, 169–170; the end of the chapter on purity in Mālik's *Muwaṭṭa' is* also dedicated to the *siwāk.*

15. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh,* I:4, 1831. The line also appears in al-Shāfiʻī, *al-Umm,* KJ, chap. 9, no. 3202 (at the end of the discussion on spousal washing initiated by the anonymous provocateur); Ibn Saʻd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 1, pt. 2, 59–60 (related in connection with the washing of Muḥammad in his *qamīṣ);* al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* 3rd ed. (Cairo, 1987), 1:569, no. 1155; and Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 9, no. 1464. For an idiomatic translation of the protasis, see Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863), s.v. *istadbara.* See also A. Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad,* 688. Literally, one might also say, "Were we facing now what we have already left behind us …" Some versions report the opening statement in the plural *(law istaqbalnā min amrinā mā istadbarnā, mā ghassala rasūl Allāh iliā nisā'uhu).*

16. See John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints,* ed. and trans. E. Brooks, in *Patrologia Orientalis,* 17:1, 18:4, 19:2 (Paris, 1923–1925). Compare Ibn Isḥāq's version of Muḥammad's death also to the hagiographical treatment of Simon the Stylite. See Bernard Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues, ou la mort du Stylite," in *Les Saints et leur sanctuaire,* ed. C. Jolivet-Lévy et al. (Paris, 1993), 21. Cf. Peter Brown, *"Gloriosus Obitus:* The End of the Ancient Other World," in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity,* ed. W. Klingshirn and M. Vessey (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1999), 292. On the

development of Christian historical writing and its relation to classical forms, see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,* trans. W. Trask (Princeton, N.J., 1953), chaps. 2–4.

17. Éric Rebillard, *Religion et sépulture,* 121, 125, 126–129, 141. I thank Scott Bruce for referring me to Rebillard’s work.

18. On *sīra* as “practice,” see M.M. Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam: Studies in Ancient Arab Concepts* (Leiden, 1972), 123–139. See the list of transmitters of the *Sīra* in Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad,* xxx.

19. *EI*^{2}, s.v. “Ibn Isḥāḳ.” John Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu,* 70–81, offers an insightful comparison between Mālik and Ibn Isḥāq.

20. Norman Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1993), 23–24, 27, 36–38, argued that the canonical *Muwaṭṭa’* was the product of Cordoba around the time of ‘Abd al-Raḥman II. The text may have been “doctored” by Mālik’s pupils, but it was not “authored” by them. For critical remarks versus Calder’s notions of authorship, see Y. Dutton, *Origins of Islamic Law,* chap. 2; H. Motzki, “The Prophet and the Cat”; and M. Muranyi, “Die frühe Rechtsliteratur zwischen Quellenanalyse und Fiktion,” *Islamic Law and Society* 4 (1997): 224–241.

21. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 594.

22. See Michael Lecker, “Muḥammad at Medina: A Geographical Approach,” *JSAI 6* (1985): 36, 57.

23. Compare Mālik’s position to that of Sinān ibn Gharafa, one of the Messenger’s Companions who settled down in Syria. Sinān related from the Prophet “concerning the woman who dies [alone] among men, or the man who dies [alone] among women, that they are to be absolved by sand, meaning they are not washed.” Sinān did not specify that family members were exempt from the restriction. See Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 2, 138.

24. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 591.

25. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 592.

26. Various oral traditions highlight even more the distance between Muḥammad and his daughter’s corpse while it is being dressed. One report envisions Muḥammad sitting at the threshold of the door; see chap. 3, p. 104.

27. Al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ Muwaṭṭa’ al-Imām Mālik* (Cairo, 1961), 2:242.

28. See Qur’ān 53:16 and 56:28, as well as Lane, *Lexicon,* s.v. *sidr.* The foreign origin of camphor is mentioned in al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ Muwaṭṭa’,* 244; and in Lane, *Lexicon,* s.v. *kāfūr.* See Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), 255, on the connection between camphor and cinnamon, neither spice being native to Arabia. On Baṣra’s trade routes, see Pellat, *Le Milieu baṣrien et la formation de Ǧāḥiẓ,* 19–21. The archaeological excavations at Siraf have provided evidence for the trading network linking the eighth-century Islamic world with India, China, and eastern Africa; see Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne, and the Origins of Europe: Archaeology and the Pirenne Thesis* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983), 133–149. For evidence from the ‘Abbasid period, see George Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (Princeton, N.J., 1951), 64, *66,* and 69.

29. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa,’* KJ, no. 595: *wa-laysa li-ghusli `l-mayyit ‘indanā shay’un mawṣūfun, wa-laysa li-dhālika ṣifatun ma‘lūmatun, wa-lākin yughassalu fa-yuṭahharu.* Like Mālik, Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:27–28, ruled against prescribing dogmatically on the washing of corpses. See also al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘,* KJ, chap. 15.

30. *Mālik, Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 593.

31. *Mālik, Muwaṭṭa’,* “Kitāb al-Ṣalāh,” chap. 12, no. 52. This report served as an occasion for one of the most detailed descriptions of the ritual, in Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,*

5:35–37. Ibn Sa‘d provides a different version of the story than Mālik, as he represents ‘Abdallāh and his client Nāfi‘ (d. ca. 737) preparing for burial (rather than merely perfuming) ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Sa‘īd ibn Zayd’s corpse.

32. From the “Kitāb al-Qiblah,” *samā‘of Ibn* al-Qāsim, according to Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *Al-Bayān wa al-taḥsīl,* KJ, 206.

33. As reported by Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 550: *wa-dhakara … anna `l-mar’ata aḥaqqu bi-ghasli zawjihā idhā māta fi `l-ḥaḍar, wa-in kāna ‘indahu min al-rijāl man yughassiluhu, wa-kadhālika al-rajulu fī zawjatihi.*

34. Cf. Y. Dutton, *Origins of Islamic Law,* 37ff.

35. Al-Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, chap. 1, no. 304.

36. Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 185.

37. Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 549: *yughassilu aḥad al-zawjayn ṣāḥibahu, wa `l-mayyita minhumā ‘uryānan min ghayr* ḍ*arūra.* In the last clause I have followed the editor’s vocalization.

38. Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 184–185.

39. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 2987–2989. The *Muwaṭṭa’* completes the ruling with *“fa-yuṭahharu.”* ‘Aṭā’ (d. 732), a famous jurist from Mecca, apparently declared one washing permissible if it resulted in a clean corpse. Most jurists considered a single washing necessary *(wājib).* In contrast to Mālik, Ibn Ḥanbal preferred for corpses to be washed at least three times. If impure matter *(najāsa)* continued to flow from the hind parts, then five washings were in order. On this see Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, nos. 340–342.

40. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* recension by Suwayd al-Ḥadathānī, KJ, 311.

41. Unless otherwise indicated, references to the debate are from al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, chap. 9, nos. 3171–3203.

42. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 378; Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 185; al-Shaybānī, *Kitāb al-Aṣl (al-ma ‘rūf bi al-Mabsūṭ)* (Karachi, n.d.), 1:433–43*6.* Mālikites and Ḥanafites subscribed to opposing sides in this debate. Jurists considered also the issue of a man washing a slave girl’s corpse. The Mālikite Ibn al-Qāsim held it was acceptable for him to wash her, as for her to wash him. By contrast, the Ḥanafite al-Shaybānī held that the state of *‘idda* is what gives a wife the right to wash her husband. A slave girl cannot wash her master and a man cannot wash his wife or slave girl, due to their lack of *‘idda.* There is, however, a complication in the case of the slave girl subjected to *istibrā’* (a period of sexual abstinence) after her master’s death.

43. Al-Dārimī, *Sunan* (Cairo, 2000), 1: no. 80; Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 9, no. 1465; al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ: no. 3203. See also Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 378.

44. For an evaluation of the legal divergence, see Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 378. Though aware of divergent opinions, the Shāfi‘ite jurist al-Māwardī, *Al-Ḥāwī al-kabīr fī fiqh madhhab al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī: wa-huwa sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Muzanī* (Beirut, 1994), 3:15–18, argued that the husband has more of a right than others in the washing of a wife’s corpse. He granted the husband priority over maternal kinsmen because of his right to observe more of the married woman’s body. However, in considering the case of a deceased married man, al-Māwardī held that paternal kinsmen are more entitled than surviving wives to wash the corpse. In an unpublished paper on Sunni modesty regulations entitled “Out of Sight and Therefore Out of Mind,” Eli Alshech writes briefly about the washing of deceased married women. He argues that Sunni jurists were mainly interested in protecting women’s reputations, not in sexual morality.

45. Al-Ṭūsī, *Istibṣār,* KJ, chap. 117, 196–200, entitled “The Lawfulness of a Husband’s Washing of His Wife and of a Wife’s Washing of Her Husband.” No. 703

on Jesus and Mary. On the right to wash a dead wife, see Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 177, no. 2; Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* 1:199–200, no. 474.

46. See al-Ṭūsī, op. cit.; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 157–59; and Zayd ibn ʻAlī (attrib.), *Majmūʻ al-fiqh,* KJ, 68–70.

47. Al-Shāfiʻī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3198 (on Abū Bakr and wife) and no. 3020 (on entitlement). Ibn Saʻd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:208, includes a curious account of Abū Bakr's last will. Supposedly al-Qāsim (ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, d. ca. 724), one of Medina's Seven Jurists, had declared that "Abū Bakr left a will that his wife Asmā' should wash him. If she was unable to accomplish this, then their son Muḥammad should help her." Muḥammad ibn ʻUmar, one of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's pupils, questioned the veracity of this report on the grounds that Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr was only three years old when his father died. A corrected version attributed to Mecca's jurist ʻAṭā' held that Abū Bakr's son ʻAbd al-Raḥmān had been designated to help his mother in the ritual. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 463, no. 378, specifies the cases where it was considered permissible to cross the sexual boundary.

48. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 1, 7 and 20 (quotation).

49. Ibid., 150, 11, 16, 139.

50. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 378. This source claims that Sa‘īd (ibn al-Musayyab, d. ca. 715) and al-Zuhrī (Ibn Shihāb, d. 742) found repugnant *(kariha)* Abū Qilāba’s act. Rulings attributed to them are not necessarily genuine, as indicated by J. Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence,* 243–247. In this case, because they are so contrary in spirit to Mālik’s dicta on the washing of corpses, one is certainly entitled to suspect their authenticity. On the washing of children’s corpses by members of the opposite sex, see also al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl,* 1:440. Al-Shaybānī considers it acceptable for men and women unrelated by marriage or kinship to wash a deceased child who had not yet learned to speak. He makes it clear that one should not wash members of the opposite sex if they had been candidates for copulation. According to Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:163, the fifth Imam by the reckoning of Twelver and Ismā‘īli Shī‘ites, Abū Ja‘far (Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Bāqir), commanded an *umm walad* (or slave-mother) to wash the private parts of the corpse of ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (d. ca. 712). Cf. al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rīkh* (Beirut, 1960), 2:303, 308, where it is somewhat less clear who conducted the ritual. I thank Chase Robinson for this reference.

51. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Athār,* 78, no. 383.

52. The *ḥisba* manuals do mention the profession of male and female corpse washers, the *ghassāl* and *ghāsila;* see Maya Shatzmiller, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World (Leiden,* 1994), 144. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Sam‘ānī, *Kitāb al-Ansāb* (Hyderabad, 1962–1982), 10:41, no. 2893, includes an entry on the profession and mentions several famous corpse washers.

53. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 20816, 27366, 27375. The hair-braiding detail is reported at the end of the traditions, as if tacked on.

54. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3003–3008. Cf. Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:217, where ‘Ā’isha expresses surprise when entering a house where a corpse’s hair was being combed. “Why do you do this with your dead?” she asks. See also al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im,* KJ, 230, on tucking within the folds of the shroud any fallen hair, nails, or flesh.

55. For comparison, see the study on hair dyeing by G. Juynboll, *Studies on the Origins,* chap. 4. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3009 (on the use of a stick), nos. 2999, 3017, 3356 (on squeezing the stomach), no. 3366 (on the use of camphor), and nos. 3010–3012 and 3333–3335 (on the depilation of pubic hair). On the devil in the nails, see M. J. Kister, *Society and Religion from Jāhiliyya to Islam,* article X. For a more explicit description of squeezing the stomach, see Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 333. On the Ibāḍi position concerning spousal corpse washing, see Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:217. Finally, see Abū Dā’ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 16, no. 3112, for a tradition interpreted rather creatively to justify the taking of pubic hair and nails from an ill man.

56. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3332. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, nos. 330, 342, 344. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 255, no. 20, represents the “daughters of water” *(banāt al-mā’),* that is, worms, coming out of the dead man’s nostrils.

57. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 384. H. Granqvist, *Muslim Death and Burial,* 64, records a modern case of postmortem circumcision.

58. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no 3333. Cf. *BT Shabbath* 151b for another method to reduce the tumescence of the belly. In the process of putrefaction, corpses do become quickly distended; see Thomas A. Gonzales et al., *Legal Medicine: Pathology and Toxicology* (New York, 1954), 59–70.

59. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 2996–2997, 3336; 2998, 3337. These citations are from different chapters of the *Kitāb al-Umm:* chapter 1 *(bāb mā jā’a fī ghusli `l-mayyit)*

is a record of what al-Rabī’ ibn Sulaymān heard from al-Shāfi‘ī himself, while chapter 17 *(ghusl al-mayyit)* is based on a written record of al-Shāfi‘ī’ s teaching that al-Rabī‘ obtained from an acquaintance. The reports complement rather than contradict each other. On the difficulties of determining what precisely al-Shāfi‘ī said, see Christopher Melchert, “The Meaning of *Qāla `l-Shāfi‘i in* Ninth Century Sources,” in ed. James E. Montgomery, *‘Abbasid Studies: Occasional Papers of the School of ‘Abbasid Studies. Cambridge, 6–10 July 2002* (Leuven, 2004), 277–301; and Joseph E Lowry, “The Legal Hermeneutics of al-Shāfi‘ī and Ibn Qutayba: A Reconsideration,” *Islamic Law and Society* 11 (2004): 1–41.

60. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 2998, 3021; 3338–3340; Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 370–372, no. 332.

61. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3348–3349, 3341, 3350.

62. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 140, no. 4; and 142, no. 6.

63. Al-Ṭūsī, *Istibṣār,* KJ, chap. 120, no. 728; Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:29–30.

64. The terms are discussed in Lane’s *Lexicon.* On variation in the *‘awra* depending on gender and social status, see Johansen, “Valorization of the Human Body,” 75.

65. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3000.

66. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3018: *aḥabbu ilayya in ra’ā min al-Muslim shay’an an lā yuḥadditha bihi, fa-inna `l-Muslim ḥaqīqun an yastura mā yukrahu min al-Muslim.* See Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 332; the opinion regarding the innovator belongs to Ibn ‘Aqīl.

67. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh,* I:1, 162–163. Ilai Alon, *Socrates in Mediaeval Arabic Literature* (Jerusalem, 1991), 74, corresponding to Phaedo 117d; n. 209 indicates that certain versions substitute “anybody” for “women.”

68. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3074.

69. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* vol. 6: “Kitāb Ahl al-Kitāb,” no. 9934.

70. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3024.

71. Al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl,* 1:413, 412; cf. 1:436.

72. Al-Khallāl, *Aḥkām ahl-al-milal,* 215, nos. 208 and 209.

73. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, nos. 337, 338, 342, 378.

74. Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 185.

75. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, nos. 340–342.

76. Ibid., no. 346.

77. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 27371; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 4, no. 167, and KJ, nos. 1254–1256; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 12, 42–43; Abū Dā’ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, no. 3145; Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 8, no. 1459. I conducted the analysis of parallel reports on the basis of *isnād* and *takhrīj* analysis by CD-ROM (Ḥarf Information Technology, *Mawsū‘at al-ḥadīth al-sharīf 2.1,* Cairo, 1988), taking *Musnad Ahmad* 14:26039 as my point of reference; this citation corresponds to Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 27371, in the edition cited in the bibliography. A variant in ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6081, also traced to Ayyūb, does not mention Muḥammad’s daughter: it specifies that first the washer takes two rags and places one over the visage, the other over the genitals; following this he does the ablution for prayer and only then begins with the right parts. Finally, there are various traditions collected on this point of ritual in Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 241–242.

78. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3013.

79. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 342.

80. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi’,* KJ, chap. 17, commentary on tradition no. 993. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 8, preamble to tradition no. 1253. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3023, adopts the same position as the one ascribed by al-Tirmidhī to Mālik.

81. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi’,* KJ, chap. 17.

82. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 268–269; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6108–6114; no. 6113 on Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri’s dictum. Katz, *Body of Text,* 155–157, has nicely shown how “fluid” were “the basic outlines of the system of impurity” insofar as the status of corpses is concerned. She refers to many of the same traditions, but without pointing out their factional character.

83. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3023; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, preamble to tradition no. 344. See ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6106, for evidence of a dogmatic concern with the status of believers; no. 6115 for ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s own position.

84. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘,* KJ, chap. 17, conveniently reports on the various positions. See also ‘Abū Dā’ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 39, nos. 3160–3162 and commentary. Concerning Abū Ḥanīfa’s position, see al-Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, chap. 8, no. 315; interestingly, al-Shaybānī here implies Ḥanafite-Mālikite agreement. Mālik’s position, however, was somewhat ambiguous and Abū Ḥanīfa’s position unclear. According to Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Athār,* 78, nos. 385–386, Abū Ḥanīfa held that whoever washes the dead should wash himself. On ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Mubārak, see G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition, 67,* 120, 174, 237–238.

85. See Abū Dā’ ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 39, no. 3160.

86. A. Kevin Reinhart, “Impurity/No Danger,” *History of Religions* 30 (1990): 10, 14, describes this consideration of persons or substances as “impure but not dangerous” as typical of Islamic notions of purity. Also see Katz, *Body of Text, 2.*

87. Al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl, r.62–63.* This reference is mentioned in Katz, *Body of Text,* 250 n. 25.

88. See, again, Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 268–269; and ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6108–6109. Compare the latter traditions to nos. 6102–6105, which specify that corpse washers should perform *ghusl* only if the deceased is *najis.* These traditions represent an intermediate stage in the controversy: obviously, they emerged after it began seeming problematic to categorize dead Muslims as substantively impure, yet before resolution of the issue. The Kūfan transmitters include Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 778), Abū Isḥāq (al-Sabī‘ī, d. ca. 755), Jābir (ibn Yazīd al-Ju‘fī, d. ca. 745), al-Sha‘bī (d. ca. 722), and al-Ḥārith (al-A‘war, d. ca. 684).

89. *EI*^{2}, s.v. “Nadjis.” See al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi,* KJ, 160–161, for a range of instructions on what corpse washers and handlers should do after contacting the cold or warm bodies; the term *najis* does not appear in this discussion.

90. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 161–163; see also al-Ṭūsī’s *Istibṣār,* KJ, chap. 120, no. 731. Twelver Shī‘ites would also issue specific instructions on how to prepare the dead for burial when the corpse was in a state of major ritual impurity; see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 154, item 1, and al-Ṭūsī’s *Istibsdr,* KJ, chap. 115, no. 679.

91. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ: 4, 140.

92. According to Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf, K*J*,* 248. By contrast, a famous jurist from Mecca, ‘Aṭā’, alongside the Kūfan authority ‘Alqama (ibn Qays, d. ca. 686), found no problem with menstruating women or men defiled by sex washing the dead. ‘Alqama’s position is given on the authority of Ibrāhīm (al-Nakha‘ī, d. 715), Manṣūr (ibn al-Mu‘tamir, d. 749), and Sufyān (al-Thawrī, d. 778), all Kūfans.

93. Al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl,* 1:436. See also Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Athār,* 78, no. 384. For an early collection of traditions on the issue of washing and shrouding polytheists’ corpses, see ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* vol. 6: “Kitāb Ahl al-Kitāb,” nos. 9934–9940.

94. See A. J. Wensinck, “Die Entstehung der muslimischen Reinheitsgesetzgebung,” *Der Islam* 5 (1914): 62–80, a general treatment on points of convergence between Jewish and Muslim conceptions of purity. On the parallels with respect to dietary laws, see Michael Cook, “Magian Cheese: An Archaic Problem in Islamic Law,” *BSOAS* 47 (1984): 449–467; and idem, “Early Islamic Dietary Law,”

JSAI 7 (1986): 218–277, particularly the conclusion. Specialists on Zoroastrian purity laws have in fact suggested that a Muslim ritual of purification *(wuḍū')* developed after the model of *pādyāb-kustī* ablutions. Yet they have also noted that Zoroastrians adopted the term *ghusl* to refer to the *Sī Shūy Nāhn* ablutions, purification rituals applied after contact with dead matter. It is difficult to make any case in favor of influence, whether in one direction or the other, given the problem of dating and localizing the sources. In any case, see Jamsheed Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism* (Austin, Tex., 1989), 61, 62, 88, 94, 102. Marion H. Katz, *Body of Text,* 8 and passim, argues for "the adoption of the general outlines of a Zoroastrian ritual by the early Muslims." Iraqi jurists did not readily partake of all things Magian, prohibiting their women and slaughtered animals; on this see M. Morony, "Conquerors and Conquered: Iran," *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society,* ed. G. Juynboll (Carbondale, Ill., 1982), 81. On the Persian and Magian elements in Baṣra and on the intimacy of Jewish-Muslim relations there, see Pellat, *Milieu baṣrien,* 34–37, 217–220, 226, and 230.

95. *BT Mo'ed Ḳaṭan* 15a–b. See David Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta, 1987), 115; chaps. 5 and 8:3 compare the Levitical attitude toward corpses to the archaeological record as well as to other outside sources. *Ṭohorot* also has much to do with the corpse as a locus of uncleanness, on which see Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Purities* (1977), pt. 11, 8 and 102–105; and pt. 22, 24–25, 60, 72–75, 90–99, 124–125, 145–147.

96. See, for instance, *Semaḥot (The Tractate "Mourning"),* ed. and trans. Dov Zlotnick (New Haven, Conn., 1966), 4:8.

97. *The Zend-Avesta,* vol. 1, *The Vendīdād,* trans. James Darmester (Oxford, 1880), 53–54, 69–72, 94–95 (on water); 185–189 (on hair and nails); and 122–129 (on the corpse demoness). Generally on purity laws and their devolution, see J. Choksy's fascinating book, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism;* 107–110 (on corpse bearers) and 117–118 (on bull's urine). On Muslim-Zoroastrian cooperation in burials, see Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (New York, 1997), 128 and n. 51.

98. J. J. Modi, *The Funeral Ceremonies of the Parsees: Their Origin and Explanation* (Bombay, 1905) 17–23; J. Choksy, "Zoroastrianism," in C. Johnson and M. McGee, eds., *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife* (Philadelphia, 1998), 255. Also see the article on "Burial," sections 3 and 4, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London, 1985–2001).

99. See the articles on "Burial" and "Cemetery" in *The Encyclopaedia Judaica,* and the article on "Burial Sites" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East,* ed. Eric M. Meyers (New York, 1997).

100. Home burials, located sometimes in the courtyard and sometimes in a bedroom (*h.ujra*) within the house, were not uncommon in Muslim neighborhoods in tenth-century Baghdad nor in various other cities ranging from Qom to Cairo. Thus, 'Abdallāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ was "buried in his home" (*dufina fī dārihi*), according to Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 2, 190. Abu `l-'Abbās Ah. mad ibn 'Umar ibn Surayj (d. 918) was buried "in his bedroom" (*fī ḥujratihi*), located in Ghālib's small market in Baghdad; and Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī "in his home" (*fī dārihi*). For the last two, see Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān* (Cairo, 1948), 1:50, no. 20; and 3:332, no. 542, respectively. Franz Rosenthal, *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (Albany, N.Y., 1989), 1:77–78, examines al-Ṭabarī's contentious burial. He claims it "was not unusual for individuals to be buried in their houses," but that al-Ṭabarī was buried "at night" in order to prevent conflict with the Ḥanbalites. In n. 121, Rosenthal records yet another

example of home burial. Burial in the *dār* may on occasion refer to the courtyard. See also Th. Leisten, *Architektur für Tote,* 12–13, 35–39, 110–122, 213–215, 337, as well as other entries under the indexed term *Hausbegräbnis;* and Michael Cooperson, "The Grave of al-Ma'mūn in Tarsus: A Preliminary Report," in James E. Montgomery, ed., *'Abbasid Studies: Occasional Papers of the School of 'Abbasid Studies, Cambridge, 6–10 July 2002* (Leuven, 2004), 48. Despite the fact that Muḥammad was buried at home, jurists would eventually discourage burial in houses (*buyūt*) and recommend instead burial in cemeteries (*maqābir*); on this, see Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 441. Also see chap. 5, p. 146, for al-Shāfi'ī's earlier recommendation.

101. See J. Modi, *Funeral Ceremonies of the Parsees,* 2–5.

102. *BT Shabbath* 151b. The minor Talmudic tractate *Semaḥot* does contain explicit references to rituals in preparation of burial, though in general the focus of this tractate is on the activities of mourners. Even here, however, we learn about the rituals in question indirectly. The chapter devoted to the legal status of a dying man specifies, for instance: "His jaws may not be bound nor his orifices stopped … until the moment he dies" (I:2). The concern of the rabbis in this case was not with the ritual itself but with the treatment of a person who is still alive. A. Bender, "Beliefs, Rites, and Customs Connected with Death, Burial, and Mourning as Illustrated by the Bible and Later Jewish Literature," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 7 (1895): 259, offers a few details on the washing of corpses. His information is culled from Ezekiel 36:25 as well as other unspecified sources, perhaps from the early modern traditions of the *Ḥevra Kaddisha,* a charitable society devoted to rituals in preparation for burial first attested in sixteenth-century Prague; on this see *The Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 8:442–446. Benzion Dinur, *Yisra'el ba-Golah: meḳorot u-te'udot* (Tel Aviv, 1971), vol. 2, pt. 5, 116, no. 7, mentions the good deed (*ḥesed*) of washing the corpse, including all the limbs; no. 5 simply calls it an Israelite custom (*minhag Yisra'el*).

103. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism,* 8.

104. Similarly, see Katz, *Body of Text,* 205.

105. 'Abd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'ālibī, *Ghurar akhbār mulūk al-Furs wa-siyarihim,* ed. H. Zotenberg (Paris, 1900), 258–260, as cited by Katz, *Body of Text,* 10.

106. Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics,* trans. A. Arberry (London, 1966), 25.

107. Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism,* 8, 18. Also see Touraj Daryaee, "Apocalypse Now: Zoroastrian Reflections on the Early Islamic Centuries," *Medieval Encounters* 4 (1998): 192.

108. A formulation borrowed from L. Taylor, "The Uses of Death in Europe," *Anthropological Quarterly* 62 (1989): 149–154, at 149.

109. Katz, *Body of Text,* 205–206, comes to a similar conclusion.

110. Pellat, *Milieu baṣrien,* 230–232.

111. See the "Answers of Ja'qōb to Jōḥannān 'Esṭūnārā," in *Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition* (*Corpus scriptorum Christianorum orientalium,* vols. 367 and 375, *Scriptores Syri,* tomes 161 and 163), ed. Arthur Vööbus (Leuven, 1975–1976), I (vol. 367, tome 161), no. 13, 239.

112. Alfred Rush, *Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity* (Washington, D.C., 1941), 116 and 24. We learn from Gregory of Nyssa that Makrina's body was anointed with wine and herbs; see M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in the Greek Tradition* (Cambridge, 1974), 27. Byzantine officials were often interested in funding the funeral procession and the burial of commoners, but left "*la toilette du mort*" to family and disciples, if not to charitable organizations; on this, see Gilbert Dagron, "État, Église, corporations, confréries: à propos des inhumations à Constantinople (IVe–Xe siècle)," in *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantine,* ed. V. Kravari et al. (Paris, 1991), 2:166. On the connection between baptism and death, see Éric Rebillard, *In*

hora mortis: Évolution de la pastorale chrétienne de la mort aux IVe et Ve siècles dans l'Occident latin (Rome, 1994), 32, 35, 129–135; and, for general context, Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200–c.1150* (Cambridge, 1993).

113. Philippe Ariès, *Hour of Our Death,* 30–31 and passim. See also Ann Marie Yasin, "Commemorating the Dead—Constructing the Community: Church Space, Funerary Monuments and Saints' Cults in Late Antiquity" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2002), 1:58–61 and 96; Peter Brown, *Cult of the Saints,* 4 and passim; and idem, "Gloriosus Obitus," 289–291. Katz, *Body of Text,* 205–206, also cites Ariès and Brown. Though in general she argues for Muslim appropriation of the Zoroastrian system of ritual purity, in considering the status of corpses she argues for a resemblance between Muslim and Christian views.

114. *Semaḥot,* XII:10 and IV:1 (Zlotnick's translation). *Semaḥot* XII:12 denies a man the right to enter a bathhouse with his father, yet Rabbi Judah allows a son to bathe an old and sick man, and presumably also his corpse.

115. On the various peoples of Baṣra, see Pellat, *Milieu baṣrien,* 21–42. Louis Massignon, "Explication du plan de Basra," ed. F. Meier, *Westostliche Abhanadlunge: Rudolf Tschudi zum siebzigsten Geburstag* (Wiesbaden, 1954), 163–165, portrays the city as the Babel, if not the Sodom, that caused his hero Ḥallāj to abandon plans of marriage in favor of an ascetic life.

116. *EI*^{2}, s.v. "al-Kūfa." Louis Massignon, "Explication du plan de Kūfa," *Mélanges Maspéro,* vol. 3, *Orient Islamique* (Cairo, 1935–1940), 341–342, underscores the importance of the south-Arabian contingent in the city. In general on Kūfa, see Hichem Djaït, *Al-Kūfa, naissance de la ville islamique* (Paris, 1986).

3. Shrouds: Worldly Possessions in an Economy of Salvation

1. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 1, 74.

2. On pauper funerals in a very different context, see Thomas Laqueur, "Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals," *Representations* 1 (1983): 109–131.

3. The following studies on textiles serve to identify articles of burial attire and understand their history: Reinhart Dozy, *Dictionnaire détaillé des noms des vêtements chez les arabes* (Beirut, 1845); R. B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles: Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest* (Beirut, 1972); Yedida K. Stillman, "Female Attire of Medieval Egypt: According to the Trousseau Lists and Cognate Material from the Cairo Geniza" (Ph.D. diss.: University of Pennsylvania, 1973); and Maurice Lombard, *Les textiles dans le monde musulman du VIIe au XIIe siècle* (Paris, 1978). Key studies by specialists on material culture, weaving techniques, and textile inscriptions: Nancy Britton, *A Study of Some Early Islamic Textiles in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston, 1938); Ernst Kühnel, *Catalogue of Dated Tiraz Fabrics* (Washington, D.C., 1952); A. Baginski and A. Tidhar, *Textiles from Egypt, 4th–13th Centuries C. E.* (Tel Aviv, 1980); A. De Moor, ed., *Coptic Textiles from Flemish Private Collections* (Zottegem, 1993); Karel Otavsky et al., eds., *Islamische Textilkunst des Mittelalters: Aktuelle Probleme* (Riggisberg, 1997); and Eunice Maguire, ed., *Weavings from Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic Egypt: The Rich Life and the Dance* (Champaign, Ill., 1999).

4. In analyzing shrouds, I benefited from scholarship on gifts and the economic spirit of premodern societies. The field addressing the circulation of goods in archaic and religious societies—inspired by the classic works of Bronislaw Malinowski, Max

Weber, and Karl Polanyi—is broad. In particular I found inspiring Marcel Mauss, “Essai sur le Don,” *L’Année sociologique* 1 (1923–1924): 30–186, translated into English as *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies,* trans. W. Halls (London, 1990). For an elaboration on Mauss’s ideas, see Marshal Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York, 1972), chaps. 4 and 5; Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986); and Natalie Z. Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-century France* (Madison, Wis., 2000).

5. A composite of various references, including: Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 2, pt. 2, 52–53 and 63–67; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 728, 801, 2021, 2284, 2357; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6163–6169, 6174; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1264; Abū Dā’ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, no. 3153; al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im,* KJ, 231; Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* vol. 1, no. 421; Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri,* vol. 2, *Qur’ānic Commentary and Tradition* (Chicago, 1967), document no. 6, verso, no. 16. An interesting tradition claims that Muḥammad had initially been shrouded in red silk, but at the last moment this elegant shroud was taken from him and given to ‘Abdallāh ibn Abī Bakr, with the result that the Prophet was buried in plain white. See Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 25059; less embellished in Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 11, no. 1469; Abū Dā’ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, no. 3149 and 3152; and Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 258.

6. On Yemenite textiles, see Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles,* 122–134.

7. For various suggestions on the origin of *“sundus,”* see Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān* (Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1938), 179–180. On *“sindón,”* see G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961–1968), and H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1996). Bar Hebraeus, “Nomocanon,” *Scriptorum veterum Nova collectio,* ed. Angelo Mai, vol. 10 (Rome, 1838), chap. 6:1, refers to its usage as a winding shroud in the phrase *“de involutione cadaverum in sindone.”* There is a post-Qur’ānic story that the King of the Rūm gave Muḥammad such a garment, which seemed to many eyes descended from Heaven *(min al-samā’).* But the Prophet thought little of it, as he pondered a finer garment in the Garden, so he had the gift sent onward to the Negus of Ethiopia. See Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 1, pt. 2, 151–152. In *Meccan Trade,* 101–103, Crone argues that it makes “no sense” that Qurashī merchants could have imported to Mecca (or Medina) fine Syrian or Coptic clothing.

8. See M. Abdesselem, *Thème de la mort dans la poésie arabe,* 87–88; as well as various references under “kafanun” in *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache.* The poem quoted is by al-Mumazzaq al-‘Abdī, for which see Mufaḍḍal ibn Muḥammad, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* (Cairo, 1952), 300, no. 80, line 2b: *“wa-albasūnī thiyāban ghayra akhlāq.”* Note ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī‘a, *Dīwān* (Leipzig, 1901–1903), 91, poem 116, line 6: *“as‘arta nafsaka ḥubba Hindin fa`l-hawā / ḥattā talabbasa fawqahu akfānuhu.”* Also see Ismā‘īl ibn Bashshār’s poem in al-Buḥturī, *Le kitāb al-Hamasah* (Beirut, 1910), 152, no. 794, line 4: *“fa-thawā laysa lahū mimmā ḥawā / ghayru akfānin….”*

9. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 2, pt. 2, 65 and 67.

10. Hayyim Cohen, “The Economic Background and the Secular Occupations of Muslim Jurisprudents and Traditionists in the Classical Period of *Islam,” JESHO* 13 (1970): 16–61, esp. 26–28 and table A-1 on 36. The statistics are based on the *nisba,* which helps identify more precisely family rather than individual occupations. Scholars formed a loose body, with the overlapping identities determined by their secular occupations. For this formulation, see R. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership,* 135–150.

11. Quoted in S. D. Goitein, “The Rise of the Near-Eastern Bourgeoisie in Early

Islamic Times,” *Cahiers d’Histoire Mondiale* 3 (1957): 588 n. 18.

12. See H. Cohen, “Economic Background and Secular Occupations,” 27, on the relative strength of Kūfan as opposed to Baṣran religious scholars qua silk merchants. Lombard, *Textiles,* maps on 56–57 and 72–73; Baṣra, however, was also contiguous to an area where silkworms were eventually raised (see his map on 88–89).

13. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 149–150, no. 12; al-Ṭūsī, *Istibṣār,* KJ, chap. 122, no. 744. Possible colors are inferred from the reference to *‘uṣab.* On white shrouds, see al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan,* KJ, no. 1896; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 20256–20257.

14. Lombard, *Textiles,* 11–15, 61, and 249–253.

15. A point made by Jochen Sokoly, “Between Life and Death: The Funerary Context of Ṭirāz Textiles,” in *Islamische Textilkunst des Mittelalters* (Riggisberg, 1997), 71–78. My thanks to Paula Sanders for this reference.

16. For good, technical discussions on dating methods, see De Moor, *Coptic Textiles,* 23–27, and Kühnel, *Dated Tiraz Fabrics,* 101–109.

17. Britton, *Early Islamic Textiles,* 23.

18. For the provocative quote, see Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses,* 11–12. Compare to Hugh Kennedy, “From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria,” *Past & Present 106* (1985): 3–27, who traces transformations in the design of cities to the sixth century, before the rise of Islam. Compare also to Alan Walmsley, “Production, Exchange, and Regional Trade in the Islamic East Mediterranean: Old Structures, New Systems?” in Inge Lyse Hansen and Chris Wickham, eds., *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution, and Demand* (Leiden, 2000), 265–343. On the basis of archaeological records, Walmsley argues for a differentiated and nonlinear process of change, yet generally emphasizes the early eighth century as a period of extensive transformations. I thank Alan Walmsley for sending me a copy of his article.

19. De Moor’s *Coptic Textiles,* Maguire’s *Weavings,* and Baginsky’s and Tidhar’s *Textiles from Egypt* do not show a radical break in style as a result of the rise of Islam. Garments from ca. 500 look remarkably similar to garments ca. 900.

20. For a nice example, see Maguire, *Weavings,* 83.

21. Britton, *Early Islamic Textiles,* 37.

22. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 77 *(Kitāb al-libās),* nos. 5950–5951, 5817, 5959. Not all traditions appear uniformly opposed to colorful weavings: no. 5958 refers to the spotting of a curtain with a woven picture in the home of a dying man yet suggests that “a design on cloth” would not keep angels away from the house. Tradition no. 5954 holds that Muḥammad found a curtain with realistic representations *(tamāthīl)* problematic, so ‘Ā’isha took it down and made a cushion *(wisāda)* or two out of it. Al-Bukhārī relates the tradition under a chapter entitled “What is to be trodden upon of images” *(mā wuḍi’a min al-taṣāwīr).* A clear disjunction exists between al-Bukhārī’ s interpretation and the actual content of the tradition, since rather than trampling upon the weavings, ‘Ā’isha put them to use in cushions. This reflects a process of iconoclastic radicalization.

23. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān* (Cairo, 1901), 70–75, 78–79, 222.

24. For a sense of the vitality of this economy, see Goitein, “Rise of the Near-Eastern Bourgeoisie,” and Andrew Ehrenkreutz, “Monetary Aspects of Medieval Near Eastern Economic History,” in M. A. Cook, ed., *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East* (London, 1970), 37–50.

25. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 3, pt. 1, 113; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 266; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6210 and 6212.

26. The price of a generic garment *(thawb)* ranges from one to fifteen dinars in the Geniza accounts, according to the data collected in Stillman, “Female Attire,” 106–

114. All other references are from S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (Berkeley, Calif., 1988). On the poor man's wages and the poll tax: 5:77–78; on the man of middling income, 4:160; on the will of the Jewish woman, 5:154; on the price of liberating captives, 5:462; to compare the cost of shrouds to other funerary expenses, see the tables in 5:160 and 5:550–551.

27. Descriptions of the ritual of shrouding *(takfīn)* or the process of dressing (the verbs favored were *udrija* and *sujjiya)* are rare and usually uninteresting. For one good example, see al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3033. On visiting the dead after incorporation in shrouds, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 3 *(al-dukhūl 'ala `l-mayyit ba'd al-mawt idhā udrija fī akfānihi)* and nos. 1241 and 1244. John Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and the Wahábys Collected During His Travels in the East* (London, 1831), 1:281, mentions the scarcity of linen in Bedouin burials, and then exclaims: "I know of a sheikh of the Omran Arabs, on the eastern gulf of the Red Sea, who entertains such apprehensions of not being properly buried, that he constantly carries with him on his journies a winding-sheet prepared for himself."

28. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* KJ, no. 6202. Cf. al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl,* 1:422.

29. See, for comparison, the poem of Ḍabbā' ibn al-Ḥārith and the story of the shrouding of the martyr Ḥamza, both cited below, notes 77 and 76.

30. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 1, 57 and 95.

31. Ibid., 8:18, 51–52, 185–186.

32. Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany, N.Y., 1994), 36.

33. Israel Museum, Inv. No. 933/70; see Baginsky and Tidhar, *Textiles from Egypt,* 125 and 130, no. 184, a piece dated to the eighth or ninth century. The fact that the saints have haloes and that the garlands form a cruciform suggests usage by Christians.

34. Maguire, *Weavings,* 108.

35. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 77, no. 5952.

36. Kühnel, *Dated Tiraz Fabrics,* 5–6, claims "it is not impossible that it was brought by Marwān II himself on his flight to Egypt." However, more likely than not, this as well as other *ṭirāz* fabrics were given by caliphs to various subjects. See also F. Day, "The Ṭirāz Silk of Marwān," *Archaeologica Orientalia in memoriam Ernst Herzfeld,* ed. G. Miles (New York, 1952), 39–61.

37. Exceptionally, pilgrims who had entered a state of ritual purity yet failed to reach their destination before death were buried with their head uncovered. Apparently they were incompletely attired so as to signify that they had not completed their ritual journey. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, nos. 1267–68; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 1850, 2600, 3230. M. J. Kister, *Society and Religion from Jāhiliyya to Islam,* article I, deals with the early history of this ritual invocation and makes clear its connection to the *ḥajj.*

38. For the famous example of Abū Bakr unveiling and kissing the Prophet, see Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra,* 2:655–656. On the ritual of kissing the dead *(taqbīl al-mayyit),* see 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6774–75; Ibn Wahb, *al-Jāmi' fī al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1995), vol. 1, no. 156; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1241; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi',* KJ, no. 989; and Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 11, nos. 1456–1457.

39. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. *66,* no. 4993.

40. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi',* KJ, no. 994. There are many examples of burial in *prayer* garments. See, for instance, Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* 1:186, and other references below. On the purity of white, see Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 20174, 20205, 20221, and 20239.

41. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 14607; Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* vol. 3, bk. 62 (Kitāb al-

aḍāḥiyy), 108, no. 3130. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 4, pt. 1, 22. See Lane, *Lexicon,* s.v. *ḥibara.* The *“burd ḥibara”* apparently derived from Yemeni manufacture. Made of cotton or linen, typically this garment was striped. See ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6209, on Muḥammad’s order to seek shrouds generously. See Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 15090, on beautifying a brother’s shroud. See Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs,* 92, on the benefit of red.

42. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 262.

43. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6210.

44. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 25059, 24177; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6176. Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français* (Beirut, 1944), glosses the term *muhla* as “sanie d’un cadavre.” In this predilection for used shrouds, Irene Grüter finds confirmation for *“die luxusfeindliche Tendenz”* of the early Islamic tradition. See her “Arabische Bestattungsbräuche in früh-islamischer Zeit,” *Der Islam* 32 (1955): 86–87. Compare Abū Bakr’s example to al-Ma’mūn’s, a caliph who asked for new shrouds in his last testament, as recorded in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh,* III:2, 1136. For an interpretation of an ‘Abbasid caliph’s choice of shrouds, see Tayeb el-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Hārūn al-Rashīd and the Narrative of the ‘Abbdsid Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1999), 57–58.

45. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 599; al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3030.

46. The standard example for men was set by Muḥammad’s three Yemenite cloths; the standard example for women was set by the five pieces given to Muḥammad’s deceased daughters. See Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 350, on the number of shrouds for women as well as for the reference to Ibn al-Mundhir’s opinion. See Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 263 and 261, on Ibn Sīrīn’s and ‘Ā’isha’s opinions. See Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs, 76*–79*,* on the preference for odd numbers.

47. Cf. Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, 1997), xi, 7, 22–34, 79, 99–104, 177.

48. *BT Mo‘ed Ḳaṭan* 27b; *Kethuboth* 111b and *Menaḥoth* 41a; *Niddah* 61b. Cf. *‘Abodah Zarah* 65b, where such garments are seen as fit for a *meth mitzvah,* a corpse discovered on the roadside by passers-by, whose obligation it becomes to bury it properly. Shī‘ites, who tended to boast of burial in expensive garments, report that the Muslim community *(ummat Muḥammad)* developed a preference for cotton *(quṭn)* in distinction from Israel’s (that is, *Banū Isrā’īl’s)* predilection for linen *(kattān)* burial garments. As Rabban Gamaliel promoted linen shrouds in consideration of paupers, the Muslim divergence appears striking. See al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 149, no. 7; al-Ṭūsī, *Istibṣār,* KJ, chap. 122, no. 741. For examples of lavish expenditures on shrouds, see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 149, nos. 8 and 9. See *BT Sanhedrin* 48a–b, for the last reference.

49. Matt. 27:60, 28:4; John 20:6–7; A. Rush, *Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity,* 125–127, 130; “Life of Antony by Athanasius,” in *Early Christian Lives,* trans. C. White (London, 1998), 90–92; *Synodicon orientale ou Recueil de synodes nestoriens,* ed. and trans. J. B. Chabot (Paris, 1902), 489–490. The distance between the Muslim and the Christian sensibility must not be exaggerated. Canon 19 includes a revision of Canon 18 with respect to shrouds. Apparently, a number of priests had protested the proposal, forcing the synod to rule in favor of modest but comfortable burial attire.

50. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 51, nos. 2612 and 2615; see also bk. 77, nos. 5787, 5830–5832, 5836.

51. L. Kinberg, “Compromise of Commerce: A Study of Early Traditions Concerning Poverty and Wealth,” *Der Islam 66* (1989): 193–212. Kinberg’s article

serves as a corrective to Goitein's "Rise of the Near-Eastern Bourgeoisie." She argues that the "renunciation of worldly goods was always the main current in Islam, and traditions favoring property and wealth arose only as a concession to the rising economic power of the bourgeoisie." Kinberg contends "it was not the bourgeoisie who dominated the scene and developed Muslim religious law."

52. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʻ,* KJ, no. 995 (my emphasis).

53. Cf. Kinberg, "Compromise of Commerce," 198, argues that Muslims regarded "any type of property … as an obstacle on the way to Heaven." This does not seem to be true of shrouds.

54. ʻAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6197.

55. Goitein, "Rise of the Near-Eastern Bourgeoisie," 590–593; Halil Inalcik, "Capital Formation in the Ottoman Empire," *The Journal of Economic History* 29 (1969): 101–102; Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton, N.J., 1981), 130, 134.

56. Qur'ān 18:31 (both words have the same root of *th-w-b),* 2:259, 22:23, 35:33, 76:12, 22:19, 14:50.

57. ʻAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6208. Also see chap. 7, p. 228 and n. 108, in the present volume.

58. ʻAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6760, on the exchange of real for magical shrouds. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 77, no. 5844 *(kam min kāsiyatin fi `l-dunyā ʻāriyatin yawma `l-qiyāma).* ʻĀ'isha was supposedly scandalized by the prospect of joining the mass of naked bodies on Judgment Day, on which see al-Ghazālī (pseudo?), "al-Durrah al-fākhirah fī ʻulūm al-ākhirah," in *Majmu'at rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī* (Beirut, 1997), 6:139. On dressing up for meeting with God, see al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mābsūt* (Cairo, 1906–1913), 2:60.

59. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 149, no. 6. Note, however, that some Muslims believed the angels in charge of the inquisition of the grave—the first event to occur after burial—would reward good Muslims with *sundus,* brocade, and "a shroud from the Garden" *(kafan min al-janna),* all for use in the grave. On this, see al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 165, 180, and 183; and Leah Kinberg, "Interaction Between This World and the Afterworld in the Early Islamic Tradition," *Oriens* 29–30 (1986): 291.

60. See Noel Coulson's *Succession in the Muslim Family.*

61. On the relationship between the Qur'ānic dicta and inheritance laws, see David Powers's *Studies in Qur'ān and Ḥadīth.*

62. Al-Dārimī 23:3110, as cited in Ḥarf Information Technology, *Mawṣūʻat al-Ḥadīth al-sharīf 2.1;* al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 25; ʻAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6223–6226. *Al-Shāfiʻī, Kitāb al-Umm,* 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Beirut, 1983); *Mukhtaṣar al-Muzanī,* KJ, "Bāb ʻadad al-kafan wa-kayfa al-ḥanūṭ," 131; note that this is an alternative edition to the one normally cited in this book. Al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabsūṭ,* chap. "al-iqrār fi `l-maraḍ," 18:24 and 28. Al-Nuʻmān, *Daʻā'im,* KJ, 232.

63. ʻAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6222. For an example of a insolvent man shrouded, see Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 14543.

64. Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā,* vol. 9, "Kitāb al-mawārīth," 253–254, no. 1709; idem, KJ, 121–123.

65. See the late but gripping formulation in al-Ashʻarī (d. 1203, attrib.), *Kitāb Shajarat al-Yaqīn* (Madrid, 1987), chap. 19, 53r.

66. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 38, no. 2289; bk. 39, no. 2295; and bk. 43, nos. 2398–99. Also see the last paragraph of chap. 5, in the present volume.

67. See, for instance, al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʻ,* KJ, nos. 1078–79; al-Shāfiʻī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3311.

68. See W. Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects,* article XII, 74–75.

69. See the illuminating discussion in Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 374, on whether or not the shroud is "necessary" *(wājib)* for heirs or simply customary *('ādah).*

70. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:143.

71. Al-Ṭusī, *al-Istibṣdr,* KJ 122:742.

72. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 144, no. 7.

73 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-bukhald'* (Leiden, 1900) 53–54.

74. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 2, 29.

75. Ibn Ḥanbai, *Musnad,* nos. 2217, 23717, 21115.

76. There is some discrepancy in the traditions. See A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad,* 385, 387–389; and Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 1418, 12302; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6194; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 260; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqdt,* vol. 3, pt. 1, 5–9.

77. See Dabbā' ibn al-Ḥāriths poem in Bishr ibn Abī Khāzim's *Dīwān* (Damascus, 1960), 88, no. 16, line 27b: *"yaqulna, a-lā yulqā 'ala `l-mar'i mi'zar."*

78. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 263–64; also 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6218 and 6227.

79. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6099.

80. Al-Shāfi'i, *al-Umm,* vol. 13 (1996), "Al-Mukātab," 724, no. 28322; and 730, no. 28356. Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana* (Cairo, 1905), vol. 14, "Kitāb al-Rahn," 11.

81. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, no. 592; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8.22–23 25; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 27205; Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, no. 3157.

82. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥḥ,* KJ, chap. 12 ad loc. 1257.

83. Ibn Abī Shayba. *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 265–266.

84. Ibn Hazm, *Muḥalld,* KJ, 122–123, no. 571.

85. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 374.

86. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 267. On robbing the dead, see al-Shāfi'i, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3237.

87. Al-Bukhāri's "Book of Gifts" *(Kitāb al-Hibah),* included in *al-Ṣaḥḥ,* discusses such issues.

88. For a discussion on the difference between *hadiyya* and *rishwa* and the various social problems involved in such transactions, see Franz Rosenthal, "Gifts and Bribes: The Muslim View," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 108 (1964): 135–144.

89. Cf. P. Geary, *Living with the Dead,* chaps. 4 and 10; Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Rhinoceros Bound: Cluny in the Tenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1982), 31–37, 82; Stephen D. White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio Parentum in Western France, 1050–1150* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1988), chap. 2.

90. Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* vol. 2, "Kitāb al-zakāt," 59–60 *(Takfīn al-mayyit wa-iṭā' al-yahūdī … min al-zakdt).* Idem, vol. 3, "Kitāb al-nudhūr al-awwal," 126 *(Bunydn al-masdjid wa-takfīn al-mayyit min kaffārat al-yamīn).*

91. Al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabsūṭ,* vol. 2, "Kitāb al-zakāt," 202.

92. Divergence summarized by al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabsūṭ,* vol. 9, "Kitāb al-sariqah," 159–160. See also al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Umm,* vol. 12, "Kitāb al-ḥudūd wa-ṣifat al-nafy," 561, no. 23521.

93. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 164.

94. See Abū Khirāsh al-Hudhalī's poem in al-Marzūqī, *Sharḥ Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah,* vol. 2 (Cairo, 1951), entry 262, 787, line 4: *"wa-lam adri man alqā 'alayhi ridd'ahū l wa-ldkinnahū qad sulla 'an mājidin maḥḍi.* "

95. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6209; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 267.

A more extensive discussion of this problematic (do shrouds honor the living or the dead?) exists in *BT Sanhedrin,* 46b, 47a.

96. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 21431.

97. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 21523. M. J. Kister, *Concepts and Ideas at the Dawn of Islam* (Aldershot, Hampshire, 1997), article V, 119, represents these governmental offices as sources of corruption.

98. Ghāda al-Qaddūmī, trans., *Book of Gifts and Rarities (Kitdb al-Hadāyd wa al-Tuḥaf)* (Cambridge, 1996), includes a list of such books, some of which date to the ninth century. See table on 17–23.

99. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:77–78.

100. See Gilbert Dagron, "État, Église, corporations, confréries: à propos des inhumations à Constantinople (IVe–Xe siècle)," in V. Kravari et al, eds., *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantine* (Paris, 1991), 2:155–182; Ewa Wipszycka, "Les confréries dans la vie religieuse de l'Egypte Chrétienne," in the *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of Papyrology,* ed. D. Samuel (Toronto, 1970), 511–525; Éric Rebillard, *Religion et Sépulture,* 111, 130, 139–141; idem., "Les formes de l'assistance funéraire dans l'Empire romain et leur évolution dans l'Antiquité tardive," *Antiquité tardive* 7 (1999): 269–282. The charitable society known by Jews as the *Ḥevra Kaddisha* may have been at work in some form in late antiquity, but the earliest hard evidence for its role of disposing of the dead comes from sixteenth-century Prague (see the *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 8:442–446). However, see *BT Mo'ed Ḳaṭan* 27b and *Semaḥot* XII:5 on the death-related activities of the Jewish associations.

101. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi',* KJ, no. 1070; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 69, no. 5371.

102. Note, however, that Ibn Qudāma considered the public treasury responsible for the shrouds of a dead wife who lacked the support of relatives.

103. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 22888. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1277, and bk. 77, no. 5810.

104. Muḥammad's deathbed garments, incidentally, were preserved (see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 77, no. 5818), possibly to serve as funeral attire. Legend has it that Muḥammad used to command his wives, whenever the barber visited him, to preserve for their own burial a forelock from his head as well as clipping from his fingernails. Perfumed with musk and tucked in the folds of shrouds, these relics presumably wielded a certain power over death. See Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:300; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 256; al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (London, 1966), 33:1108–1109. David S. Margoliouth, "The Relics of the Prophet Mohammed," *The Moslem World* 27 (1937): 20–27, mentions both that the caliph Mu'āwiya was buried in a shirt given to him by Muḥammad and stories about caliphs wearing Muḥammad's mantle yet stripped naked at the moment of death.

105. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 4680, 14990, 15079; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, nos. 1350, 1366. Being spat upon by the Prophet was no humiliation if his saliva carried blessings; on this matter see A. Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs,* 103 and 182. I owe the formulation "gift gone wrong" to Natalie Davis's *The Gift.* In a conflicting version of this anecdote, the Prophet gives the garments to the son, who shrouds his father before transporting the body to the grave. Also see Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, no. 344.

106. See n. 19 of chap. 1, above.

107. See Kühnel, *Dated Tiraz Fabrics,* 5–6, on Marwān's *ṭirāz;* see *6* on al-Ma'mūn's *tirdz* (Arab Museum 9439). On the funerary context *of ṭirāz* textiles, see J. Sokoly "Funerary Context of Ṭirāz Textiles." See also Paula Sanders, "Robes of Honor in Fatimid Egypt," in Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes and Honor: The Medieval*

World of Investiture (New York, 2001), chap. 9. Sanders extends Sokoly's proposition to consider cast-off robes *(khila‘)* bestowed by Fatimid rulers on the powerful and the wealthy. She argues, with reference to the work of Louise Marlow, that these robes served to express in style a hierarchical culture opposed to the egalitarian ideals of the religious scholars. I thank Paula Sanders for sending me a copy of her article.

108. See the list in Kühnel, *Dated Tiraz Fabrics, 6.*

109. On the interpretation of economic behavior in light of social constraints, see the formulation by Mark Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," *American Journal of Sociology* 91 (1985): 481–510. With reference to Karl Polanyi's notion of the "embedded economy," Baber Johansen has argued that Muslim law distinguishes between, on the one hand, unrestricted and rational "commercial exchange" *(tijāra),* and on the other hand, "social exchange" subject to a hierarchical order. See his articles "Commercial Exchange and Social Order in Hanafite Law," in Christopher Toll and J. Skovgaard-Petersen, eds., *Law and the Islamic World, Past and Present* (Copenhagen, 1995); and "Échange commercial et hiérarchies sociales en droit musulman," in H. Bleuchot, ed., *Les institutions traditionelles dans le monde arabe* (Paris, 1996), 19–28.

4. Wailing for the Dead in the House of Islam

1. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, KJ, no. 1301. The phrase *hayya’at shay’an* is obscure; it may refer to Umm Sulaym beautifying herself before her husband’s arrival. For various interpretations, see Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo, 1978), commentary on no. 1301. For the uncensored version, see Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:315–318 (entry on Umm Sulaym), and 5:53–54 (entry on ‘Abdallāh ibn Abī Ṣalḥa, the first son who was born as a result of Muh. ammad’s blessing). Ibn Sa‘d identifies the deceased son as Abū ‘Umayr.

2. For earlier treatments of the topic, see Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies,* 1:209–238; and G. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition,* 96–133.

3. Lucian, “On Funerals,” in *Lucian,* trans. A. M. Harmon (London, 1925). The anthropological literature on mourning rites is extensive. For an argument in consideration of cultural variations in emotional reactions to death, see Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1991), chap. 2. Anthropologists who regard emotional reactions to death as culturally determined rarely consider the historical problem that cultures change. However, for anthropological perspectives on the power of bereavement in a changing environment, see Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures,* 142–169; and Renato Rosaldo, “Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage: On the Cultural Force of Emotions,” in *Text, Play, and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society* (Washington, D.C., 1984), 178–195. On the psychological front, see John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss* (London, 1980), and Colin Murray Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life,* 3rd ed. (New York, 1996). For a sociobiological argument on bereavement, see John Archer, *The Nature of Grief: The Evolution and Psychology of Reaction to Loss* (London, 1999), chap. 4. See also Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872; repr. London, 1998), 168, 175; Jeanne Altmann, *Baboon Mothers and Infants* (Cambridge, 1980), 129–130; Geza Teleki, “Group Response to the Accidental Death of a Chimpanzee in Gombe National Park, Tanzania,” *Folia Primatologica* 20 (1973): 81–94; and Bertrand-L. Deputte, “Perception de la mort et de la séparation chez les primates,” in Tobie Nathan et al., eds., *Rituels de deuil, travail du deuil* (Éditions: La Pensée sauvage, 1995), 183–236.

4. See M. Alexiou, *Ritual Lament in the Greek Tradition,* 7, 14–23; Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women’s Laments and Greek Literature* (London, 1992), 114–126. For comparative purposes, see also Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, “Gestes et expressions du deuil,” in Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Cécile Treffort, eds., *A réveiller les morts: la mort au quotidien dans l’Occident médiéval* (Lyon, 1993), 121–133; Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford, 1998), 222–225; Norman Alan Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China* (New York, 1999); Philip Fisher, “Thinking About Killing: *Hamlet* and the Path Among the Passions,” *Raritan* 11 (1991): 43–77.

5. On gender issues in connection with purity rites, see M. Katz, *Body of Text,* 86–96, 187–203.

6. This particular lament is discussed in Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 489–490, 493, no. 386. W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language,* 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 1896–1898), 1:295 (D) and 2:93 (C), discusses this type of interjection.

7. Labīd ibn Rabī‘a, *Sharḥ Dīwān* (Kuwait, 1962), 213–14, poem 28. A translation and detailed analysis of the poetry of lament can be found elsewhere. See M. Abdesselem, *Thème de la mort dans la poésie arabe,* chaps. 1–3; G. Borg, *Studie zur altarabischen Trauerklage der Frau;* P. Smoor, “Death, The Elusive Thief: The

Classical Arabic Elegy.”

8. On the tearing of the garment at the breast *(tashqīq al-juyūb),* see al-Khansā’, *Dīwān* (Beirut, 1960), 110, line 8. For the spirited defense of wailing that al-Khansā’ allegealy delivered to caliph ‘Umar, see the poem on 103–104.

9. For a survey and analysis of camel burials, see Burckhard Vogt, “Death, Resurrection, and the Camel,” in Norbert Nebes, ed., *Arabia Felix: Beiträge zur Sprache und Kultur des vorislamischen Arabien* (Wiesbaden, 1994), 278–290. On the sorrow of a bereft she-camel, see p. 137 of the present volume; on camel sacrifices, see n. 4 of chap. 6 of this volume.

10. Zaynab’s lament at the death of al-Ḥusayn serves as a good example of the value placed on spontaneous poetic expressions of bereavement; see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh,* II:1, 370, 372, 365.

11. References to *dhikr* and insomnia abound. For a good example of the effects of eveningtime *tadhakkur,* see al-Khansā’, *Dīwān,* 84–85. On the type of poetry triggering a sorrowful memory, see *Averroes’ Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s Poetics,* trans. Charles Butterworth (Princeton, N.J., 1986), 101–104, para. *66.*

12. Women were considered more talented in the art of the elegy, due to their ability to suffer intensely. On this topic, see Smoor, “Death, The Elusive Thief,” 158.

13. See Durayd ibn al-Ṣimma’s poem, included in Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry* (Reading, 1992–1996), 1:67–70, lines 3–4.

14. Labīd ibn Rabī‘a, *Sharḥ Dīwān,* 168, poem 24, line 3: *“fa-lā jazi‘un in farraqa `d-dahru baynanā / wa-kullu fatan yawman bihi `d-dahru fāji‘u.”*

15. A. Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry,* 2:211, line 12: *“wa-tajalludī li `sh-shāmitīna, urīhimū / annī li-raybi `d-dahri lā ataḍaḍa‘u.* “

16. On this theme, see T. Emil Homerin, “Echoes of a Thirsty Owl: Death and Afterlife in Pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry,” *JNES* 44 (1985): 165–184.

17. Laylā al-Akhyaliyya, *Dīwān* (Baghdad, 1967), 104–106, poem 35; also interesting for the sense of persistent injustice is poem 47, p. 123.

18. Al-Khansā’, *Dīwān,* 59, verses 5 and 7, lines 18 and 20: *“lā nawma ḥattā taqūdū `l-khayla ‘ābisatan / yanbudhna ṭirḥan bi-muhrdtin wa-amhdri /… / aw tarḥadū ‘ankumu ‘āran tajallalakum / raḥḍa `l-‘awāriki ḥayḍan ‘inda athdri.”* The meter is *basīṭ.* Perhaps *yanbudhna* should read *yanbidhna,* and *ṭirḥan* as *ṭarḥan.*

19. Exceptions to this rule are numbered. According to Charles Pellat, “Marthiya,” *EI^2,* the pre-Islamic poets—male or female—refrained from expressing grief at the death of a female relative. (If such poems existed, they might have been selected out of the Islamic canon.) Jarīr seems to have broken with tradition—not without opposition—when he devoted a few verses to his wife Khālida. In later poetry, laments for deceased women are not that rare. See, for example, a striking poem for a deceased mother discussed in P. Smoor, “Elegies and Other Poems on Death by Ibn al-Rūmī,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37 (1996): 49–85.

20. Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry,* 1:45, line 14: *“ka-annahumū lam yuḥissū bihī / fa-yukhlū `n-nisā’a lahū wa `l-ḥijālā.”*

21. Al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im,* KJ, 225; al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3295; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chaps. 33, 37, and 39.

22. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 10/922.

23. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi’,* KJ, no. 999: *“laysa minnā man shaqqa `l-juyūba wa-ḍaraba `l-khudūda wa da‘d bi-da‘wati `l-jāhiliyya.”* Also see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chaps. 35 and 38.

24. Zayd ibn ‘Alī (attrib.), *Majmu‘ al-fiqh,* KJ, 76–77.

25. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 11622, 8914, 8754, and 22966–22967; cf. no. 980,

attributed to ʿAlī; and no. 1120, where the usurer, the woman who imprints tattoos, and others are cursed but the wailer is only proscribed. The term *dirʿ may,* when referring to women, denote simply a “shirt” rather than an “armor.”

26. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 491–492, no. 386.

27. Qur’ān 12:83–86 mentions the sweet patience of Joseph’s father; al-Nuʿmān, *Daʿaʾim,* KJ, 223. Other references on the matter of *ṣabr* are scattered throughout the chapter. See also Goldziher, *Muslim Studies,* 1:228–229.

28. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 30, nos. 1279–1282.

29. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 61.

30. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa,* KJ, no. 636.

31. It was the formulaic response to say in the face of death, “To God we belong and to him we are returning” *(innā li`llāhi wa-innā ilayhi rājiʿūn).* See, for instance, Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥduruhu al-faqīh,* vol. 1, no. 514. According to al-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim,* KJ, 224, this form of consolation (i.e., seeking the return to God, *istirjāʿ)* may be given by a Muslim to his *dhimmī* neighbor. The formula stems from Qur’ān 2:156.

32. Shīʿite men tended to rend their long shirts—as did Jews—for a son, a father, or an Imam. This mark of bereavement was not prescribed, merely permitted. See Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥduruhu al-faqīh,* vol. 1, no. 511.

33. Al-Sīrāfī (attrib.), *’Aḥbār al-Ṣīn wa al-Hind,* para. 35. See also Hsün Tzu, “A Discussion on Rites,” in Burton Watson, trans. *Basic Writings of Hsūn Tzu* (New York, 1967), 103ff.

34. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi’,* KJ, chap. 25.

35. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1244.

36. Ibid., no. 1304.

37. Ibid., no. 1284.

38. Ibid., no. 1299; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad,* no. 24367. The *ḥadīth* may be polemical. It portrays in a negative light the action of a group of proto-Shīʿite wailers, the female relatives of Jaʿfar (ibn Abī Ṭālib), who died fighting beyond the Byzantine frontier in 629.

39. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad,* no. 16933, where the verb applied is *ḥarrama.*

40. Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 87.

41. Muslim sources rarely draw a distinction between professional and genuine lament, yet we must keep such a distinction in mind when the discourse mentions remuneration. ʿUmar ibn Dharr’s vv between the “wailer burdened by grief” *(al-nāʾiḥa al-thaklā),* a term usually designating a bereft mother, and the “professional wailer” *(al-nāʾiḥa al-musta’jara);* see Ibn ʿAbd al-Rabbih, “Kitāb al-durra fī al-ta’āzī wa al-marāthī,” in *Al-’Iqd al-farīd,* 3rd. ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1987), 3:228.

42. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad,* no. 6922, *“kunnā naʿuddu ʿl-ijtimāʿa ilā ahli ʿl-mayyiti wa-ṣanīʿata ʿl-ṭaʿāmi baʿda dafnihi min al-niyāḥa.”*

43. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3328–3329 and 3307, loathed wailing, “even if the wailer mourns him in isolation” (*ʿala ʿl-infirād).* He considered it a good custom for neighbors and relatives to prepare food for the family of the deceased but found problematic the mournful gathering that typically accompanied this custom. For another early reference to the *ma’tam,* see M. J. Kister, “On the Papyrus of Wahb b. Munabbih,” *BSOAS 37* (1974): 554. On opposition to this ritual, see also al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Kitāb al-Ḥawādith wa al-bidaʿ* (Beirut, 1990), 334–336; and Maribel fierro, “The Treatises Against Innovations,” 233. For the pre-Islamic background to this ritual, see Éric Rebillard, “*Nee deserere memorias suorum:* Augustine and the Family-based Commemoration of the Dead,” *Augustinian Studies* 36 (2005): 99–111. In the Jewish context, see F. Astren, “Depaganizing Death,” 193–194.

44. See, for instance, Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 7913, 7563, 9376; and al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘,* KJ, no. 1001.

45. G. R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge, 1999) argues forcefully that the Muslim view of the pre-Islamic religion of Arabia emerged not as a result of direct contact with idolatrous pagans but in a sectarian, monotheistic milieu. The focus of this chapter is not on the religion of pre-Islamic Arabs but on a ritual that early Muslims would represent correctly or not as a “pagan” survival. For a definition of *al-Jāhiliyya* as the “time of barbarism” not fully superseded by Islam, see I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies,* 1:201–208.

46. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 400, no. 353.

47. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf* KJ, 274.

48. Ibn al-Mubārak, *Al-Zuhd wa al-raqd’iq* (Alexandria, 1998), 1:186, no. 233.

49. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 180 and 354: “*al-mayyitu yu’adhdhabu fī qabrihi bi “l-niydhati alayhi.”* Cf. no. 315 (widely attested): “*al-mayyitu yu’adhdhabu bi-bukd’i ahlihi ‘alayhi”* and no. 334: “*‘ bi-bukd’i ‘l-hayy.”*

50. See, for example, the description in al-Nu’mān, *Da’aim,* KJ, 226.

51. See Qur’ān 6:164 and 35:19 on the principle of bearing one’s own burden. See n. 60 and n. 97, below; also see Ibn Qutayba’s discussion, cited in chap. 7, n. 68.

52. Thus, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān,* 2nd ed., vols. 26–28 (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1954–68), 77–81, commentary on “Sūrat al-mumtaḥana,” verse 12; in this connection, see Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition,* 99. See also al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’dn* (N.p.: Dār Ihya al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1990), 9:588. Here al-Ṭūsī reminds us that *al-ma‘rūf* “the right,” is the antonym of *al-munkar,* “the abominable” or “the forbidden.” Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, 2000), does not discuss Qur’ān 60:12 but contains a number of references connecting wailers to men whose ethical duty it was to forbid wrong.

53. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb Masā’il al-Imām,* redaction by Abū Dā’ūd Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, 2nd ed. (Beirut, n.d.), 139; al-Khallāl, *al-Amr bi al-ma’rūf,* 157, no. 163. Ibn Ḥanbal’s opinion was that a man should enter a house of wailing to wash a corpse, though he should forbid the women from wailing.

54. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 171–172, no. 3. The fifth of the Twelver Shi‘ite Imams, Abū Ja‘far (Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Bāqir, d. 731), was also present. He chose to stay until the end of the ceremonies, thus fulfilling a supererogatory action. The more tolerant attitude of Shī‘ites to wailing is discussed subsequently in this chapter. Abū Ja‘far lived in Medina and ‘Aṭā’ in Mecca, suggesting a possible divide in Medinese and Meccan approaches to wailers.

55. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* KJ, no. 6681. The oral tradition identifies (‘Abdallāh) Ibn ‘Abbās as ‘Umar’s companion, yet represents ‘Umar giving a command to Abū ‘Abdallāh. This is confusing and presumably a copyist’s error. ‘Abd al-Razzāq indicates that the Basran immigrant to Yemen, Ma’mar ibn Rāshid (d. 770), found astonishing ‘Umar’s statement that “she is not at all sacrosanct.” For general context on Muslim conceptions of domestic privacy, see Eli Alshech, “Evolution of the Notion of a Private Domestic Sphere.”

56. The Meccan roots of this tradition presumably extend from Amr ibn Dīnār to his informant Ibn ‘Abbās, who participated in ‘Umar’s action against the wailers.

57. See, for instance, Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (London, 1986), 58, 60–61; W. Madelung, *Succession to Muhammad,* 55–56, 60.

58. Little has been written on ‘Umar’s approach to women as represented in the Islamic tradition, yet see Nabia Abbott, “Women and the State in Early Islam,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies 1* (1942): 114–115. On ‘Umar’s “tendency to go too far” in violating a man’s privacy in order to forbid a wrong, see M. Cook, *Commanding Right,* 81—82. On ‘Umar s approach to the association of women in

public, see Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 20823 and 27378. These traditions deal with the administration of the women’s pledge by ‘Umar. Apparently ‘Umar forbade women from following funeral processions yet allowed menstruating women and old women to attend the two festivals of *‘īd al-aḍḥā* (the sacrificial feast) and *‘īd al-fiṭr* (the celebration to break the fast of Ramaḍan).

59. The Kūfans were the only ones to keep a record of the first man wailed over in their city: Qaraẓa ibn Ka‘b, one of the Helpers encouraged by ‘Umar to settle down in Kūfa, where eventually he was appointed governor by ‘Alī. See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 933; and Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 18265.

60. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 19737. ‘Ā’isha is not mentioned in this ḥadīth; the Qur’ānic principle that each person bears his or her own burden (*wa-lā taziru wāziratun wizra ukhrā)* is mentioned.

61. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6288–6304, ad loc. 6291, cf. 6304. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 284–285, nos. 3 and 5. These traditions were not numbered by the editor; there are eleven of them, however, and for convenience they shall be referred to by number. No. 3, which closely resembles the tradition quoted from ‘Abd al-Razzāq, reads: *“kānū idhā akhraju `l-jināzata, aghlaqu `l-bāba ‘ala ‘ `l-nisā’.”* Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1278. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Al-Istidhkār li-madhāhib fuqahā’ al-amsār wa-‘ulama al-aqṭār* (Cairo, 1971), 1: KJ, 232–233, mentions a *ḥadīth* from which jurists drew authorization (*ibāḥd)* for men to visit the cemetery, but there was divergence about extending this authorization to women (*mukhtalaf fīhi li`l-nisā’*). Not surprisingly, some found repugnant (*kardhiya*) the notion of this extension.

62. āAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6289, 6295–6296. For the sake of clarity, in parentheses is specified a noun (for example, *fitna*) or a passive participle (for example, *muḥarram*), though ‘Abd al-Razzāq uses the verbal forms. The verb *kharaja ‘alā* in itself suggests not merely going out, but rising in rebellion.

63. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6290–6292. Cf. al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘a’im*, KJ, 234, where the woman disappears behind Medina’s “walls” (*judur*), in a tradition attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

64. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 284, nos. 1, 4, and 10; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6300. Note how closely Masrūq’s behavior relates to the traditions about the acts and sayings of Muhammad.

65. In addition to Sufyān al-Thawrī, Manṣūr ibn al-Mu‘tamir, and Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī, mentioned above, the following traditionists and jurists figure as transmitters: Abū Usāma (Ḥammād, d. 816), Wakī‘ (ibn al-Jarrāḥ, d. 811), MuḤammad ibn Fuḍayl (d. 810), Abū Mu‘āwiya (MuḤammad ibn Khāzim, d. ca. 810), Hafs ibn Ghiyāth (d. ca. 809), ‘Umar ibn Dharr (d. 770), al-A‘mash (d. 765), Layth (ibn Abī Sulaym, d. 760), MuḤill (ibn MuḤriz, d. ca. 769), Ash‘ath (ibn Sawwār, d. 753),al-Sha‘bī (‘āmir ibn Sharāḥil, d. ca. 725), ‘Abdallāh ibn Murra (d. ca. 718), Suwayd (ibn Ghafala ibn ‘Awsaja, d. 701), ‘Ubayd (ibn Nuḍayla, d. ca. 694), and Masrūq (ibn Al-Ajda‘, d. 682). Despite its length, this is not an exhaustive list.

66. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6289.

67. Even the mildest of these oral traditions (Umm ‘Aṭiyya’s), discussed subsequently, is not included in the *Muwaṭṭa’.*

68. Sahnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 188–189 (*fī khurūj al-nisā’ wa-ṣaldtihinna ‘ala `l-janā’iz*). Menstruating women may have formed an exception to this ruling, as they faced a number of regulations prohibiting them from participating in prayer and other religious rituals; see Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* “Kitāb al-Ṣalāh,” chap. 35; “Kitāb al-Ḥajj,” chaps. 16 and 74. According to a Mālikite lawbook, both men and women may join the procession and walk together in front of the bier, yet mingling (*ikhtilāṭ*) between the sexes must be reduced; see Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 230–231. The

Muwaṭṭa' does not deal with this subject, and it is doubtful the opinion derives from Mālik. See also Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 577–578. For Mālikite pronouncements against women joining funeral processions, see al-Ṭurtūshī, *Al-ḥawādith wa al-bida',* 336–337. Note in these statements the distinction drawn between female relatives and female strangers.

69. On Āisha's procession, see the beginning of chap. 5 of this volume.

70. Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 230–231. See also Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 577–578. The *Muwaṭṭa'* does not deal with this subject. The earliest reference to a Medinese configuration, where men and women join the procession in separate groups, is traceable to Ma'n ibn 'Īsā (d. ca. 813), a pupil of Mālik's. He mentioned that Khālid ibn Abī Bakr (d. ca. 778) saw two famous Medinese authorities, al-Qāsim (ibn MuḤammad ibn Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, d. ca. 724) and Sālim (ibn 'Abdallāh ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, d. ca. 724), grandsons of the first and second caliphs, walking in front of the bier, while the women followed from behind the bier. See Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 385, where this tradition is categorized as a concession (*rukhṣd*) enabling women to attend funerals. Perhaps this concession originated in response to the Kūfan restrictions. See also Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Istidhkār li-madhāhib fuqahā' al-amṣdr,* KJ, 232–233, for a discussion on whether or not men and women can visit the cemetery.

71. Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 243. According to al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im,* KJ, 227, Alī dictated to Rifā'a ibn Shaddād, his magistrate (*qāḍī*) over al-Ahwāz, a town in Khūzistān: "Beware of wailing over the dead in a city over which you have sovereignty *[sulṭān]."*

72. The Shāfi'ite position is difficult to determine. Al-Shāfi'ā himself did not discuss the issue in the *Kitdb al-umm,* nor did subsequent Shāfi'ite commentators consulted. For instance, al-Shīrāzī, *A-Muhadhdhab,* 1:445, specifies that canales and wallers must not accompany funeral processions, but says nothing about women in general; al-Nawawī, *Minhāj al-Ṭālibīn,* I.4.4, 226, finds abhorrent the "visiting of graves" (*ziyārat al-qubūr*) by women but not by men, yet it does not make this distinction in connection with the ritual in question (*ittibā' al-jdnā'iz*). It is possible that, like Mālik, al-Shāfi'ī was not overly concerned with mingling between the sexes during the funeral procession.

73. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Athār,* chap. 11, no. 411, p. 82. Cf. al-Kāsānī, *Badā'i' al-Ṣanā'i',* 1:310, who concludes merely that it is "not necessary" for women to join processions. See Ibn Ḥanbal, *Masā'il al-Imām,* redaction by Isḥāq al-Nīsābūrī, KJ, 192, no. 955. It is not clear whether Ibn Hanbal's formulation refers to "the following of biers" (*ittibā' al-janā'iz*) or "the visiting of tombs" (*ziyārdt al-qubūr*). The ambiguity was probably not accidental, but rather a purposeful reference to both rituals.

74. See 'Umar ibn MuHammad al-Sunāmī's *Kitāb Niṣāb al-Iḥtisāb,* trans. M. 'Izz al-Din, *The Theory and the Practice of Market Law in Medieval Islam* (1997), chap. 42, 166; my thanks to Kristen Stilt for this reference. Concerning non-Muslims, see al-Shayzarī, *Nihāyat al-rutba fi ṭalab al-ḥisba (Book of the Muhtdssib*) (Cairo, 1946), chap. 39 and appendix 1. Ironically, thousands of women attended the funeral of the neo-Hanbalite Ibn Taymiyya, according to Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya.* I thank Walid Saleh for bringing this passage to my attention.

75. Douglas Jehl, "Following Tradition, An Affair for Men" and "Friends and Foes United in Respect," *The New York Times,* February 9, 1999. For an ethnographic example, see Gaborieau, *Ni brahmanes ni dncêtres,* 226.

76. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣdnndf,* KJ, nos. 6292, 6302, cf. no. 6295; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Musdnndf,* KJ, no. 6. Note that certain traditions were, according to their transmission history, passed from the Meccan Mujāhid (d. ca. 722) to the Kūfan Layth (ibn Abī

Sulaym, d. 760). See Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣdnndf,* KJ, 284, no. 6; and ʻAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣdnndf,* KJ, no. 6302.

77. Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣdnndf* KJ, no. 6304.

78. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣdnndf,* KJ, no. 7.

79. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:131.

80. Hichem Djaīt, "al-Kūfa," *EP,* made a similar suggestion linking the cemeteries to Shī'ite revolt; in general on the *jdbbānāt,* also see H. Djaīt, *Al-Kūfd,* 285–296. Cautiously consult L. Massignon, "Explication du plan de Kūfa," *Mélanges Mdspero,* vol. 3, *Orient Islamique* (1940), 337, 344, 347–348.

81. Kennedy, *Age of the Caliphdtes,* 89, 95, and passim. On caliph Marwān's approach to wailers, see ʻAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣdnndf,* KJ, no. 6674; cf. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muḥdnndf,* KJ, 285.

82. Scenes of lament feature prominently in the annals of al-Ṭabarī of the 680s; see, for instance, vol. II:1, 323–324, 365–366, 370, 372, 379, 381, 383–385, 389–390, 485, 497ff. The surviving accounts are neither contemporary nor entirely reliable, marred as they are by Sunni polemic and Shī'ite sensitivity. Even so, the evidence suggests that the wailing of Shī'ites, the tribes of Qays, and other discontented parties became an acute problem in the 680s. Occasionally, Sunni polemic against Shī'ite wailing is explicit. Cook, *Commanding Right,* 118, refers to a Ḥanbalite fantasy to kill a Shī'ite woman mourning for al-Ḥusayn.

83. On the importance of lament in medieval Shī'ite spirituality, see Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of ʻĀshūrā'in Twelver Shiʻism* (The Hague, 1978), chaps. 1 and 5. With the modern passion play in mind, Shiʻism has been described as the prototypical "religion of lament" by Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (London, 1984), 146–154. See also W. Madelung's *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam,* article XII.

84. Al-Nuʻmān, *Daʻā'im,* KJ, 226, 225, 227.

85. Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* vol. 1, no. 553. Compare to a tradition from Maʻmar (in ʻAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* KJ, no. 6694) that seeks to show the Helpers had misunderstood the Prophet, who did not want any wailing for Ḥamza. In general on Ḥamza and wailing, see Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra,* 2:97–99, 151–158.

86. Al-Bukhārī, *ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 6, nos. 1248–1251, on the grace of the bereft parent who resigns himself or herself to God's judgment (*faḍl man māta lahu waladun fa-iḥtasaba*), potentially acquiring a veil from the fire (*ḥijāb min al-nār);* see no. 1293, on the protection granted by angels (*fa-mā zālat al-malā'ika tuẓilluhu bi-ajniḥatihā hattd rufiʻa*). Twelver Shiʻites held that even impatient parents deserved a reward. See Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥduruhu al faqīh,* vol. 1, no. 518: "The reward *[thawāb]* of a believer on account of his son who dies is the Garden, whether he endures patiently or not" (*ṣabara aw lam yaṣbir*).

87. Al-Bukhārī, *ṣaḥīḥ,* 16, nos. 1043, 1063. F. Buhl, "Māriya," *EI*², dates the death by the eclipse to January 27, 632.

88. Al-Nuʻmān, *Daʻā'im,* KJ, 224. Cf. al-Bukhārī, *ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1303; Ibn Saʻd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 86–93, and 8:153–156. See also al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf* 1:448–453. For an earlier suggestion on sectarian differences in oral traditions about Ibrāhīm, see Goldziher, *Muslim Studies,* 2:103–104; cf. Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunnī Islam," *JSAI* 7 (1986): 186–193.

89. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 217.

90. Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* vol. 1, nos. 551–552. Cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 20636, where Qays ibn ʻĀṣim expresses in his last will, "May you not wail over me, for indeed the Messenger of God was not wailed over."

91. Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al faqīh,* vol. 1, no. 513, "Were *ṣabr* not created before distress" (*khuliqa qabla `l-balā'*), "the believer would be cracked apart as an egg on rocks" (*kamā tanfaṭiru al-bayḍatu ‘ala `l-ṣafā*).

92. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 225, no. 9: "The man strikes his thigh with the hand during a calamity in frustration at his [divine] recompense" (*iḥbṭ li-ajrihi*).

93. Al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq, *Al-Aḥkām fī al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām, 2:* KJ, 156.

94. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 29/934: *"arba‘un fī ummatī min amri `l-jāhiliyyati lā yatrukūnahunna: al-fakhru fi `l-aḥsābi wa `l-ṭa‘nu fi `l-ansāb wa `l-istiqā'u bi `l-nujūm wa `l-niyāḥa."*

95. *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i,* trans. W. M. Thackston (Boston, 1978), 85. Similarly see al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘d'im,* KJ, 226. The Jewish woman's deathbed declaration (TS 13 J3, f. 3) is edited in S. D. Goitein, *Sefunot,* 8 (1964), 122–125; and translated by him in *A Mediterranean Society,* vol. 5, *The Individual,* 153–155. See also John Lewis Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahábys* (London, 1831), 1:280; Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians,* 212; H. Granqvist, *Muslim Death and Burial,* 53–54, 92ff ; and C. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures,* 142–169. John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia* (London, 1829/1968), 388–389, remarks that wailing prevailed nearly everywhere in the eastern Mediterranean and Arabia, with the notable exception of Medina under the Wahhabis.

96. See, for instance, Al-Khansā', *Dīwān,* 48, lines 11–13, verses 3–5; and the famous poem by Mutammim ibn Nuwayra, a male poet comparing his bereavement to that of a she-camel, included in Alan Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry,* 1:119–122, verses 32–35.

97. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, no. 630; al-Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, 320; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 9, 534–536; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, nos. 1288–1289; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 24356 (*re: jurm*), no. 24691 (re: *‘amal*), no. 26471 (re: Jew's punishment). The relevant verses in the Qur'ān are 8:46 (on God's bond with the patient ones), 6:164, and 35:19 (both on not bearing another's burden). There is some confusion in the sources about the sex of the deceased. On the accusation of lying in the transmission of traditions related to wailing, see Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition,* 108–133. Muḥammad supposealy gave women the concession (*rukhṣa*) to weep over dying or deceased relatives. On this issue, see M. J. Kister, *Society and Religion from Jāhiliyya to Islam,* article XIII, 8 and no. 28. Also see Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition,* 103 and no. 27.

98. Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 44, no. 3167. Also see ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6288 (cf. no. 6289); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīh,* KJ, chap. 11, nos. 34–35; Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1278 and 6, no. 313; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan,* KJ, 41–42; and Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 27372 and 20823. In some of these traditions, the second woman in the chain of transmission is replaced by a man, and occasionally Kūfan transmitters replace Baṣran ones in the higher chain.

99. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 20822, 27376, 16556; cf. 13031, where the Prophet announces in this connection "there is absolutely no assisting [in weeping] in Islam" (*lā is ‘āda fi l-Islām*). See also Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 937; and al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* "Kitāb al-Tafsīr," no. 4892 (on Qur'ān 60:12); and KJ, no. 1306.

100. Mixed-gender transmission was culturally meaningful and should be taken into account in gender analysis. Historians of gender have represented the Oral Tradition as a male discourse, as we have seen, but surely it is worth stressing that there were female transmitters. Nevertheless, in the case of female links, as in the case of male links, it is not always clear that they actually related the traditions in question, particularly when they figure as early transmitters. Perhaps mixed-gender

traditions from Baṣra concerning wailing reflect the common rationale of eighth-century Baṣran women projected backward to seventh-century transmitters.

101. Margaret Smith, *Rābi‘a the Mystic & Her Fellow-Saints in Islam* (Cambridge, 1928), 111.

102. See, for instance, Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society,* rev. ed. (Bloomington, Ind., 1987), pt. 1; F. Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam,* trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (1991), chaps. 5 and 10. Cf. N. Coulson, *Succession in the Muslim Family,* 29–30.

103. Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "Women and Citizenship in the Qur'an," in Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, ed., *Women, the Family, and Divorce in Islamic History* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1996), 23–38.

104. Nikki R. Keddie, "Introduction: Deciphering Middle Eastern Women's History," in N. Keddie and Beth Baron, eds., *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven, Conn., 1991), 7.

105. Stowasser, "Women and Citizenship in the Qur'an," 35–36. For the second quotation, see Guity Nashat, introduction to Wiebke Walther's *Women in Islam from Medieval to Modern Times,* trans. C. Salt (Princeton, N.J., 1993), 5. Also see G. Nashat, "Women in the Middle East, 8000 B.C.E.–C.E. 1800," in Guity Nashat and Judith Tucker, *Women in the Middle East and North Africa* (Bloomington, Ind., 1999) 34–35, 46, 48–49. Compare to Leila Ahmed, "Women and the Advent of Islam," *Signs* 11 (1986): 665–691; L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 26–27, 67, 79, 86.

106. Nashat, introduction to Walther's *Women in Islam,* 6–7. See also J. Tucker, "Gender and Islamic History," 44.

107. See Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Evil, Good, and Gender: Facets of the Feminine in Zoroastrian Religious History* (New York, 2002), 23; *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism,* 94–103; "Zoroastrianism," in *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife,* 252–256. Also see Mary Boyce, *A Persian Stronghold of Zoroastrianism* (Oxford, 1977), 99–107, 149–153, and passim. Likely it was under Muslim influence that a Zoroastrian would "instruct his son that no one should weep for him when he was dead." On this see Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrianism: Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour* (Costa Mesa, Calif., 1992), 178 and no. 127, citing Persian Rivayats, dating from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Jivjanji Modi, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees* (1922, repr. New York, 1979), 67, mentions that "all the male relations and friends of the family" or "at times only the elders" assemble at the house of the deceased for the funeral procession. Cf. J. Modi, *Funeral Ceremonies of the Parsees,* 15, where he states that "those relatives and friends who wish to accompany the funeral procession" follow the bier. Unfortunately, it is not clear on what sources Modi based these observations. Furthermore, he did not discuss whether or not "pure" women could participate in this event. I thank Jamsheed Choksy for a personal communication on the matter of mourning.

108. *BT Kethuboth* 46b and *Mo‘ed Ḳaṭan* 8a, 24a, 27a–28b. "All in all," argues an historian of Jewish women, "about the only privilege left to women in Hellenistic Palestine was that of weeping—in other words, their one official position was that of publicly mourning the dead at funerals, an office common to women throughout the Near East." Yet rites of death, she continues, belonged to "the shadowy region of popular superstition and were not the concern of Judaism proper." See Léonie J. Archer, "The Role of Jewish Women in the Religion, Ritual, and Cult of Graeco-Roman Palestine," in Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt, eds., *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit, Mich., 1983), 283. Saul Lieberman, "Some Aspects of After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature," in *Harry A. Wolfson Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1965), 2:504, comments that the rabbis instructed the Jews to "comfort the mourners of the

Gentiles." See also Fred Astren, "Depaganizing Death," 184–188.

109. For an example of an attempt to differentiate Muslim from Jewish ritual, see pp. 158–159 of this volume.

110. A. Rush, *Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity,* 174–186; Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament,* 28, 34.

111. *Synodicon orientale,* 117 and 376.

112. *Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition,* II (vol. 375, tome 163), 15, 44, and 55; English translations in tome 164, 17, 47, and 59. Bar Hebraeus, "Nomocanon," chap. 6:2, 38, conveniently groups the canons topically.

113. A. J. Wensinck, "Some Semitic Rites of Mourning and Religion," *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen,* 18 (1918): 78–95, discusses weeping in an ahistorical context, drawing out parallels between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In his view, "religious weeping," particularly in Syriac Christendom but also in Islam, borrowed the ritual gestures of mourning rites.

114. Al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Sirāj al-Mulūk* (Cairo, 1994), vol. 2, ch. 51, p. 543. There are various versions of this pact, of questionable authenticity. For two recent articles, see Albrecht Noth, "Abgrenzungsprobleme zwischen Muslimen und Nicht-Muslimen: Die 'Bedingungen 'Umars' unter einem anderen Aspekt gelesen," *JSAI* 9 (1987): 290–315; Mark Cohen, "What was the Pact of 'Umar?," *JSAI* 23 (1999): 100–157.

115. Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of T. ur 'Abdin* (Cambridge, 1990), 158–159; the Syriac text alongside a facing English translation is available in that book's *Microfiche Supplement,* LXXII, para. 12.

116. [Jerome], *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae,* ed. Isidorus Hilberg, pt. 2 (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum,* vol. 55, Vienna, 1996), letter 108, para. 29.

117. *Synodicon orientale,* 486 and 489.

118. As an exception, one might cite Canon 14 of the Rule of Rabbūlā, an early Monophysite text, which specified that women and laypeople should not be gathered for funeral processions in honor of monks. This exclusion applied not only to women but also to laymen; furthermore, it concerned only monks' funerals and not in general those of all Christians. See *Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition* (vol. 367, tome 161), 1:159; English translation in tome 162, 153–154.

119. Peter Brown, *Cult of the Saints,* 43, makes the comment in view of gatherings at a shrine.

5. Urban Processions and Communal Prayers: Opportunities for Social, Economic, and Religious Distinction

1. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra, 2:663,* 665; Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, no. 620. Incidentally, 'Ā'isha continued to live in her room after the burial of Muḥammad. Proximity to the dead became an issue only in 644, according to Muslim tradition, once 'Umar I joined her husband, Muḥammad, and her father, Abū Bakr, in being buried there. It then seemed necessary for 'Ā'isha to appear properly clothed in the presence of a deceased male stranger. A wall (*jidār*) was erected in the middle of the room to separate the burial area from her intimate quarters. The concern in this case was with 'Ā'isha's modesty, not with her state of ritual purity. On this, see al-Samhūdī, *Khulāsat al-Wafā* (Medina, 1988), 2:128.

2. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh,* III:4, 2241; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:53–54. On Medina's

fortunes after the Arab conquests, see Paul Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together: Cities in Islamic Lands, Seventh Through the Tenth Centuries* (Chicago, 2001), 134; and Saleh A. El-Ali, “Muslim Estates in the Hidjaz in the First Century A.H.,” *JESHO* 2 (1959): 247–261, at 252, 260, and passim.

3. One of the Prophet’s Companions who settled down in Egypt, Muʿāwiya ibn Ḥudayj, supposealy declared: “Whoever washes a dead person, shrouds him, follows [the procession to the cemetery], and stands by his grave, returns [from performing these rites] forgiven [by God for any sins].” On this, see Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 2, p. 195. The Damascene jurist al-Awzāʿī (d. 774) explained that “following funerary processions” (*ittibā’ al-jand’iz*) is one of five duties of a Muslim to a Muslim; see al-Awzāʿī, *Sunan al-Awzāʿī: Aḥādīth wa āthār wa fatāwā* (Beirut, 1993), KJ, nos. 749ff (*ḥaqq al-Muslim ʿala `l-Muslim khams*). This book is a compilation of quotations from classical sources. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 2, nos. 1239–1240, uses the terms *ḥaqq* and *amr* to qualify the rite. Al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan,* KJ, no. 1939 also qualifies it as an *amr.* Al-Shāfiʿī, *Al-Risāla,* 368–369, no. 997, represents it as it as a key example of the kind of duty incumbent not upon every individual but upon the community as a whole. Similarly, see ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6268. By praying over the bier, one earned a single imaginary coin, and by lingering until the end of the burial, one earned two such coins; see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 172–173. Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥdur uhu al-faqīh,* 1:197, no. 464, promises that bearing a corner of the hearse erases all sins, restoring one to the state right after childbirth. On how *not* to carry the bier, see Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 176.

4. For the tradition quoted, see ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6298. On men rather than women bearing the bier, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 50 (*ḥaml al-rijāl al-jināza dūna `l-nisā*’). Al-Bukhārī’ *fiqh* may be studied on the basis of his chapter headings; in this case he derives the opinion about bearing from a *ḥadīth* (no. 1314) mentioning men’s action only incidentally. See chap. 51 for description of the ritual. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3153, says “women do not carry the dead man or woman.” Similarly, see Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Athār,* chap. 11, p. 82, no. 405.

5. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3236–3237.

6. In the CD-ROM of the Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, *Mawsū ʿat al-ḥadīth al-sharīf* 1.1 (Stuttgart, 2002), the term *qubūr* appears 196 times, whereas the term *maqbara* appears only sixteen times, usually not in direct quotations from Muḥammad. As for the term *jabbāna,* it does not appear at all. However, this collection does not include Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Musnad,* where the term *jabbāna* does appear once, as recorded by A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance et Indices de le Tradition Musulmane,* 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1992), 1:320; compare also *qubūr* and *maqbara* in 5:228–232.

7. Michael Lecker, “Muḥammad at Medina: A Geographical Approach,” *JSAI* 6 (1985): 53, assumes that the Prophet’s market took place in “what was previously” the cemetery. Cf. M. J. Kister, *Studies in Jāhiliyya and Early Islam* (London, 1980), article IX, 275. On the cemeteries of Medina and the graves of al-Baqīʿ, see the notes in Saleh Ahmad Al-Ali, “Studies in the Topography of Medina (During the 1st Century AH),” *Islamic Culture* 35 (1961): 73, 75–77, 88–89.

8. On the *jabbānāt,* see Hichem Djaït, *Al-Kūfa: Naissance de la ville islamique* (Paris, 1986), 285–296; and Massignon, “Explication du plan de Kūfa,” 337, 344, 347–348.

9. On the urbanization of the military camps, see P. Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together,* 39–40, 47, and passim; and Donald Whitcomb, “Amṣār in Syria? Syrian Cities after the Conquest,” *ARAM* 6 (1994): 23–24. Wheatley has argued persuasively that certain Islamic urban forms, which derived from shared Muslim

rituals, marked both “created” and “spontaneous” cities. Unfortunately, he does not discuss the location of cemeteries in the *amṣār,* except for a fleeting mention of Kūfa’s *jabbānāt,* on 48.

10. In Baṣra, as in Medina, a Bedouin market seems to have been located in the same place as a cemetery; see Charles Pellat, *Milieu baṣrien,* 11–12. It is difficult to determine the location of Baṣran graves, yet consult with caution Massignon, “Explication du plan de Baṣra,” 155–161.

11. W. Kubiak, *Al-Fustat: Its Foundation and Early Urban Development* (Cairo, 1987), 87, 109, and passim. The observation at the end of the paragraph is Kubiak’s. St. John Simpson, “Death and Burial in the Late Islamic Near East,” 243, remarks on “religious prohibitions on intramural burial” without citing any legal sources. Perhaps unaware of burial within cities in the Kūfan style, he may have assumed that such prohibitions existed due to the location of some cemeteries “beyond the settlement.” L. Torres Balbás, “Cementerios hispanomusulmanes,” *Al-Andalus* 22 (1957): 132, mentions that Moorish burials were held outside the city walls, following Roman tradition.

12. *EI²,* s.v. “Dimashḳ.” On the city’s famous tombs and religious shrines, see Janine Sourdel-Thomine, “Les anciens lieux de pèlerinage damascains d’après les sources arabes,” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 14 (1952–1954): 65–85.

13. Jacob Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit, 1970), 111–118, 199–204; see also “cemetery” in the index. Also see G. Le Strange, *Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate* (Westport, Conn., 1983), 57, 107, 136. The maps are tentative reconstructions based largely on literary evidence.

14. Al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘d’im,* KJ, 233, finds it permissible to use a beast (*dābba*) whenever an excuse (*‘udhr*) can be found. In a city as large as Cairo, excuses came readily.

15. Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍarāt wa akhbār al-mudhākara* (Beirut, 1971–1973), vol. 5, no. 63. Zaman, “Death, Funeral Processions, and the Articulation of Religious Authority,” 32 and 38, comments on boycotts of and poor attendance at funerals.

16. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, chap. 4, no. 605. Abū Dā’ūd, *Sunan,* KJ 46, no. 3171, a *ḥadīth* ascribed to Abū Hurayra, who led the prayer for ‘ā’isha; see also no. 3164. See also Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 180–181 (read *yutba‘ūhu* for *yunba‘ūhu);* and Ibn Abī Zayd, KJ, 570 (versus following with *nār or mijmar*). Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 400–401, records divergence on many matters of law, but in this case reports on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir (c. 930) unanimous reprobation (*yakrahu dhalika kullu man yuḥfaẓu ‘anhu*). Al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan,* KJ, no. 2043, includes a curse on those who take *suruj* to the graves. Cf. al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘,* KJ, chap. 63, endorsing night burials and condoning implicitly the use of artificial light (*sirāj*). Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:53, specifies that ‘Ā’isha’s procession was followed by torches of fire (*nār*) yet records her will before death, “Do not follow my bier with fire *[nār]*.” On the incense burner (*mijmara*), see Al-Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, 309; Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:222. Finally, see al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl,* 1:420.

17. Rush, *Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity,* 221.

18. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 607; and idem, *Muwaṭṭa’,* recension by Suwayd al-Ḥadathānī, KJ, 319. Al-Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 318, also emphasizes the time of the burial (*fa-utiya bi-jināzatihā laylari*).

19. Muslim, KJ, 71: 956. On filling the grave with light, see also chap. 1, n. 38 and n. 45, of this volume.

20. Abū Bakr, Fāṭima, ‘Uthmān, Ibn Mas‘ūd, and possibly even the prophet Muḥammad were buried at night. Exceptionally, al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣrī) seems to have considered night burials somewhat problematic. On this issue, see Ibn Qudāma, *al-*

Mughnī, KJ, 503. On the proper time for the funeral prayer, see Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, chap. 7, no. 613; al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl,* 1:429–430; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6548ff. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi',* KJ, chap. 41, records divergence in legal opinion about prohibited times. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 501–504, also surveys this matter, upholding the Ḥanbalite position against funeral prayer at three times of the day; a key consideration is conflict with prescribed prayer (*maktūba*). Al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3317–3327, argues for burial and funeral prayer at any time of the day or night. Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb,* 3:321, no. 998, explains that ordinary *prayer* characterized by submissiveness and prostration is abhorred at the rising and setting of the sun because the devil is most active then (he explains that the sun sets and rises between *qarnay Shayṭān,* the devil's horns); however, since the funeral prayer does not involve these gestures, it can be held at any time. In *al-Nihāya fī mujarrad al-fiqh wa al-fatāwā* (Beirut, 1970), 146, al-Ṭūsī specifies that ideally prayer over the bier should not conflict with a time of obligatory prayer (*waqt farida*). Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kdfī,* KJ (*bab waqt al-talat 'ala `l-fana'iz*), 180, abhors prayer at sunrise and sunset. See Mālik, *Muwatta',* vol. 1, 7:29, on refraining from prayer under the scorching sun, as the heat is like a blast from Hell.

21. Rush, *Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity,* 221–228. Bar Hebraeus, *Nomocanon,* vol. 10, section 6:1, p. 37, recommends that the funerals of bishops, monks, and other members of the Church be escorted "with chants and torches" (*cum hymnis et luminaribus*). For a most interesting article on the administration of burials in Byzantium, see Gilbert Dagron, "État, Église, corporations, confréries: à propos des inhumations à Constantinople." For evidence on the continuity of these ceremonies, see the citation below to the Pact of 'Umar. On funerary aid by Christian confraternities, see n. 100 of chap. 3 of this volume.

22. Al-Turtūshī, *Sirāj al-Mulūk* (Cairo, 1994), vol. 2, chap. 51, p. 543: *"wa-lā nuẓhira `l-nīrān,"* a statement included between clauses specifically related to the care of the dead. In the first of these clauses, Christians promise not to raise their voices for their dead; in the second, they promise not to bury their dead near Muslims.

23. For a compelling presentation of this view of the Islamic Empire, see Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J., 1993), chap. 6.

24. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh,* 111:2, 1136–1138. For an interesting analysis of two conflicting versions of al-Ma'mūn's deathbed story, see Tayeb El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography,* 112–121.

25. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:186; Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, no. 604.

26. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 1, p. 8.

27. Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 104–105.

28. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi',* KJ, chaps. 28–29; Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 48; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 28; Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 399. On how the "rider" must go behind the bier, see al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 55; and 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6284–6287. See Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:234, for a story on 'Ubaydallāh dismounting from a donkey during the funeral of Zayd ibn Ḥasan, 'Alīs grandson, because 'Abdallāh ibn Ḥasan was walking in front.

29. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:249–250.

30. Zayd ibn 'Alī (attrib.), *Majmū' al-fiqh,* KJ, 76, holds that 'Alī used to walk barefoot on five occasions amongst which he counts visiting the sick and following the bier. Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 46, no. 1568, on removing the shoes; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 107 (versus *ni'al al-sibtiyya,* or fancy shoes); al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 176 (versus *ḥidhā',* or sandals, but finding *khuff,* or slippers, acceptable). Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 514–516, surveys various stances and explains that the

reason behind walking barefoot is to signal lack of arrogance and conceit.

31. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* no. 394.

32. Ibn Saʻd, *Ṭabaqdt,* vol. 7, pt. 1, pp. 10–11. Abū Bakra, a slave emancipated by Muḥammad after his conversion to Islam, apparently also rode his mule in a funeral procession; see Ibn Saʻd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 1, p. 8, under the entry on ʻAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Samura. Circumstances would force an aged al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to pray for the deceased Abū Raja' al-ʻUṭāridī (d. ca. 723) while mounted on a donkey; see Ibn Saʻd, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 1, p. 101.

33. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, chap. 3, nos. 600–603; idem, *Muwaṭṭa',* recension by Suwayd al-Ḥadathānī, KJ, 315–16; Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 570; al-Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, nos. 307–8; Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 177; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi',* KJ, chaps. 26–27; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 56; al-Shāfiʻī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3138–3148; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Masā'il al-Imām,* redaction by Ṣāliḥ ibn Aḥmad (Delhi, 1988), no. 449; Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 15, no. 1481 (rider must go behind, walker wherever he wishes). Compare to Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-athār,* chap. 11, no. 410, p. 82, who finds acceptable to walk in front, behind, to the right, or to the left of the bier.

34. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 169–170 (marching behind is generally preferred, but one should never march in front of the bier of a polytheist or transgressor); Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍur uhu al-faqīh,* 1:197, no-464 (walking in front is not problematic, but behind is better); Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (al-ʻAllāma), *Qawāʻid al-Aḥkām,* 1:230 (it is fine to escort the bier from behind or to one of the sides). Al-Nuʻmān, *Daʻd'im,* KJ, 234; Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:215–16; Yaḥya ibn al-Ḥusayn (al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq), *Kitāb al-aḥkām fī al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām,* KJ, 155; Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Al-baḥr al-zakhkhdr,* KJ, in. The Ismāʻili, the Ibāḍi Kharijite, and the Zaydi positions represented by the last few citations are indistinguishable from the Twelver Shiʻite one.

35. Abū Ḥanīfa diverged from the Sunni mainstream in considering the forward position agreeable (*ḥasan*) but the hind position preferable (*afḍal*). See al-Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, no. 308. For awareness of the lines of division, see al-Tusi, *Khilāf,* KJ, 718–719: 533; Ibn Rushd (Averroës), *Bidāyat al-mujtahid,* KJ, chap. 4, 23–24. Here we have a case of Shiʻite-Ḥanafite rapprochement. This convergence points us in the direction of Kūfa, where Ḥanafite law had its origins and the Shiʻite movement became consolidated. Once again, in this instance as in the case of women's presence in processions, we find Sunni jurists divided according to school, yet this time, the Mālikites do not stand alone with the Shiʻites. Instead they agree with the Ḥanbalites and the Shāfiʻites, and all three disagree with the Ḥanafites and the Shiʻites. This complex shifting of positions from one legal issue to the next proves that any facile generalization about discrepancies between Sunni and Shiʻite funerary laws will easily founder. Legal divergence must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

36. Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 568. He also specifies that Fāṭima's bier (*naʻsh*) was the first covered with a tent.

37. Al-Nuʻmān, *Daʻd'im,* KJ, 233: "*awwalu ʻaali al-ākhirati `l-qubūru, lā yuʻrafu fīhā sharīfun min waḍīʻ.*"

38. Ibn Saʻd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:77.

39. See *EI*^{2}, s.v. "Ḥabash" and "Ḥabashat"; Lidwien Kapteijns, "Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa," in N. Levtzion and R. Pouwels, eds., *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens, Ohio, 2000), 228; Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History* (2001), 39–40; L. Luca Cavalli-Sforza et al., *The History and Geography of Human Genes,* abridged edition (Princeton, N.J., 1996), 173–174; Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*

of the Qur'ān, 35, 37, 82, 122, 116, and *passim.* If the term associated with Ethiopian biers, *na'sh,* derives from Ge'ez, then the case for the borrowing of a foreign technique would be stronger.

40. The term *na'sh* did not refer exclusively to the Ethiopian bier. It was typically used to designate women's biers, with the term *jināza* or *janāza* frequently referring to male biers. Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 47, no. 3194, observes this distinction, contrasting a male and a female version. Occasionally the term *na'sh* is applied to men's biers, however; see, for instance, Ibn Māja, *Sunan* (Cairo, 1998),KJ, chap. 41, no. 1559.

41. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqdt,* 8:79; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh,* III:4, 2435; Zayd ibn 'Alī (attrib.), *Majmū' al-fiqh,* KJ, 71.

42. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:25. The term *na'sh* is also used in this instance.

43. Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 57, no. 3194; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi',* KJ, chap. 45, no. 1034. It is worth mentioning another possibility for the appearance of Ethiopian biers in Baṣra. Possibly the idea arrived not through the mediation of Medina but directly from the Zanj slaves who originated in the eastern coast of Africa and lived in Baṣra. On the Zanj in Basra, see Pellat, *Milieu Baṣrien,* 41–42.

44. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh,* III:4, 2436–2437; al-Nu'mān, *Da'd'im,* KJ, 232–233.

45. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:79.

46. For a relatively early collection of traditions on this issue, see 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* vol. 6, "Kitāb ahl al-kitāb," nos. 9925–33, 9941–9946.

47. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, nos. 1367–1368.

48. Al-Khallāl, *Aḥkām ahl al-milal* (Beirut, n.d.), chap. 112, no. 619.

49. Ibid., nos. 620 and 623.

50. Ibid., no. 625.

51. See Abū Yūsuf *Kitāb al-athār,* 81, no. 401, for an example of Muḥammad's Companions accompanying the funerary procession of a Christian woman.

52. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 961; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 49.

53. Al-Awzā'ī, *Sunan,* KJ, nos. 757–759; Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, no. 3174; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 960.

54. Al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan,* KJ, 1929. The angels on procession are not to be confused with the punishing angels, however. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jdmi',* KJ, no. 1012, portrays riding behind the dead as disrespectful to the angels on procession.

55. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 192.

56. Thus, 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6321 (cf. no. 6311, which refers rather to the "people of the Book"); al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi',* KJ, no. 1020. Saul Lieberman, "Aspects of After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature," 504, comments that the rabbis instructed the Jews to "comfort the mourners of the Gentiles." On the issue at hand, see M. J. Kister, *Concepts and Ideas at the Dawn of Islam,* article VI, 329.

57. Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:215. Historians readily recognize that medieval Muslims were generally more tolerant of Jews than were medieval Christians. See, for instance, Mark Cohen, "Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 38 (1986): 125–137.

58. Al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3314; al-Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, no. 310; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi',* KJ, chap. 52; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 25; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 47; Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 581. "None of the *ahl al-bayt* ever rose for a procession," according to al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 191. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, 6312, portrays 'Alī in Kūfa reacting violently to those rising for the dead. If interpreted in light of the previous reference, this *ḥadīth* suggests sectarian behavior.Perhaps Shi'ites and Sunnis in Kūfa refused to honor each other's funerals, but the traditions

cited do not really prove it. Cf. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa,* KJ, chap. ii, shows concern with sitting down on graves; no. 626 associates the transition to sitting down with ʿAlī. Similarly, see Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa,* recension by Suwayd al-Ḥadathānī, KJ, 315. A number of these references suggest Shiʿite origins for the despondent gesture.

59. Muslim tradition advocated hastening toward burial. See al-Shaybānī, *Muwaṭṭa,* KJ, 306; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 51; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 16; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ,* chaps. 30 and 74; Abū Dāʾud, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 50; al-Nasaʾi, *Sunan,* chap. 44; no. 1912 tells a story about Abū Bakra rushing on a female mule to catch up with the procession of the funeral of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Samura.

60. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3254–3256.

61. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa,* KJ, chap. 8, no. 614, relates that ʿĀisha prayed for Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ in the mosque; the people found this blameworthy, but she defended herself by exclaiming, "What makes the people hurry? God's Messenger prayed for Suhayl ibn Bayḍāʾ in the mosque." No. 615 reports that Muslims prayed for caliph ʿUmar in the mosque. Cf. Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 580, reports that Saʿid "did not exit from the mosque for ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn's procession." Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 182, tells a story about Abū al-Ḥasan the First discouraging Abū Bakr ibn ʿIsā ibn Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī from praying for a bier inside the mosque. However, other Twelver Shiʿite sources signal clear approval for this practice: al-Ḥūsī, *Tahdhīb,* 3:320 (no. 992) and 325 (no. 1013); al-Ṭūsī, *Nihāya, 146;* Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* 1:199 (no-473)-Al-Ṭūsī, *Khilāf,* KJ, 718, no. 532, finds hurrying in funerals reprehensible while showing awareness of the divergent Shāfiʿite position.

62. According to Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 395, this dictum indicated Muslims must hurry to bury their dead so as to not resemble the Jews. He says: *yadullu ʿalā anna `l-murāda isrāʿun yakhruju (yukhraju?) bihi ʿan shibhi mashyi `l-yahūd bi-janāʾizihim.*

63. *Semaḥot* IX.9; *BT Moʿed Ḳaṭan,* 27b–28a.

64. B. Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues," 23.

65. Not unlikely, as Boyarin has argued in a different context, Muslim tradition reveals "blurred boundaries" between Muslims and Jews "at the very moment that it is trying to insist on the clarity of these boundaries." The border "on the ground" was probably fuzzier than in the text. See Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, Calif., 1999), 10, 19. Also see Fred Astren, "Depaganizing Death," 194–198.

66. See Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-athār,* 82, no. 407, for an example of Muslims remaining seated while a procession passed by. Ibn Rushd (Averroës), *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid,* KJ, 25. Cf. Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā,* KJ, 153–154, no. 591, for an interesting observation that the *ḥadīth* reports seem not to support the argument in favor of abrogation.

67. For fairly comprehensive overviews, including categories not mentioned here, see Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 596–621; and Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 444–447, 455–456, 458–460, 466, 467–471, 472–478, 504–509.

68. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1347; and Ibn Ḥanbal, KJ, 467–471. This set a clear precedent. However, there was some divergence of opinion, on which see al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ,* KJ, chap. 46. Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad,* no. 17349, reports that the Messenger prayed for the martyrs of Uḥud posthumously. On the unique burial rites for martyrs, see also E. Kohlberg, "Medieval Muslim Views on Martyrdom," 17–18.

69. On the urban martyr (*shahīd qutila fi `l-miṣr*), see al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3071. See also Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 184, on Muslim villagers martyred by a gang of outlaws. See E. Kohlberg, "Medieval Muslim Views on Martyrdom," 24–27, on the extension of the category of martyr.

70. See al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 213–214; and al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb,* 3:327–328. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3038, offers ritual instructions on how to handle the dead at sea.

71. See al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 188, 190; Zayd ibn ‘Alī (attrib.), *Majmū‘ al-fiqh,* KJ, 74; Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 182.

72. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, nos. 947–948.

73. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1366. On the hypocrites, see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 189.

74. On *prayer* for child converts to Islam, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 79. On prayer for the young ‘*ajamī* (foreign) slave or Christian slave boy beginning to convert to Islam and on prayer for the young Muslim apostate (*al-ghulām al-murtadd*), see Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 178–180. Also see Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 213ff. On prayer for a runaway of uncertain religion, see Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 277–278. On the founaling likely abandoned by Jews or Christians, see Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 258. On checking for Islamic signs (*‘alāmdi*) on a stranger, such as circumcision (*khitān*) or clothes dyed green, see Ibn Rushd, *al-Bayān,* KJ, 289; and Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 478. On the uncircumcised (*aghlaf*), see Zayd ibn ‘Alī (attrib.), *Majmū‘ al-fiqh,* KJ, 74.

75. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, nos. 1383–1385; bk. 82, nos. 6597–6600.

76. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1358.

77. On prayer for the fetus, Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 179. On prayer for the fetus who never cried, al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb,* 3:331. Also see al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘,* KJ, chaps. 42–43. Compare the relatively lenient Muslim position to the far more stringent Christian position, as reflected by Christian discussions on burial of those who died before receiving baptism; on this matter, see Augustine’s sermon, “De Sepultura Catechumenorum,” in François Dolbeau, “Nouveaux Sermons d’Augustin, II.” *Revue des études augustiniennes* 37 (1991): 289–295. Éric Rebillard, “La figure du catéchumène et le problème du délai du baptême dans la pastorale d’Augustin,” in G. Madec, ed., *Augustin prédicateur (395–411): Actes du colloque international de Chantilly (5–7 septembre 1996*) (Paris, 1998), 285–292, argues that in this sermon Augustine follows a sacramental logic.

78. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3079–3082; Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 271, 284–285; Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 477–478.

79. Zayd ibn ‘Alī (attrib.), *Majmū al-fiqh,* KJ, 74, commands prayer for the adulteress but leaves open the option of entrusting burial rites to Jews and Christians. On prayer for the adulteress’s child, see Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 180. See also Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 619. On the status of the adulteress’s son in Twelver Shī‘ite thought, with special emphasis on his position in the afterlife, see Etan Kohlberg, *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi‘ism* (Aldershot, 1991), chap. 11.

80. On *prayer* for the stoned and for the crucified facing the *qibla,* see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 214–215; and al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb, 3:327.* See Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 177–178, on how the family may pray for a relative who died as a consequence of punishment (*ḥadd*), but the Imām who imposed the punishment should not lead the prayer. See Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 184, on prayer for thieves and murderers. See also Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 268.

81. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh,* III:4, 2333; Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:176.

82. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:73. Al-Musayyab, one of the penitent rebels, and ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, who established a countercaliphate in Mecca, were also decapitated; see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh,* III:4, 2528; and Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:169–170. The revolts against al-Manṣūr in Medina and Kūfa, in 761–762, also resulted in a few heads chopped off.

83. Mālik disliked prayer for a single hand or head, while Ibn al-Qāsim approved of prayer if the bulk of the body was present, according to Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 180. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3075–3078, offers an excellent discussion on prayer for body parts; see no. 3076, on the martyr’s hand dropped by a bird on Mecca. See also Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 279–280; and al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb,* 3:329.

84. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3074.

85. Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb,* 3:328. My formulation here follows closely the one in my dissertation. Baber Johansen, working independently on the burial prayer over condemned criminals, reached a similar conclusion. His unpublished paper, “The Burial Prayer Over the Executed Persons as a Symbolic Recognition of Their Legal Personality,” presented at the *Middle East Studies Association* in November of 2002, emphasized that “crime and capital punishment do not exclude a Muslim from her or his religious community.” Also relevant in this connection is MuḤammad Qasim Zaman, “Death, Funeral Processions, and the Articulation of Religious Authority,” 27–58. Zaman makes an interesting distinction by pointing out that, while boycotts of the funerals of wayward individuals occurred frequently, wayward individuals were not prevented from attending orthodox funerals.

86. Cf. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966), 37, 55, and elsewhere.

87. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 39, no. 2295. On the importance of settling debts before death, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 55, nos. 2748–2749. On prayer for one in debt, al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘,* KJ, chap. 70; see also chap. 77 (on how the dead person remains bound to the debt until it has been discharged). Al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan,* KJ, chaps. 65–67, covers other cases of economic interest (i.e., on the man who emancipates his slaves and leaves his heirs with nothing).

88. Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 177; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmī,’* KJ, chap. 69; al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan,* KJ, no. 1965 (on one tumbling down the mountain); Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 238–239 (on the suicidal slave girl who swallowed her *nūra*). See also al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 83, nos. 1363–1365; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 37: 978, and bk. 1 (“Kitāb al-īmān”), chap. 49. Also see Franz Rosenthal, “Suicide in Islam,” 245.

6. The Politics of Burial and Tomb Construction

1. It takes but a little imagination to see how Cain, on observing a raven scraping up dust, might have come up with the idea to conceal his brother in the earth. Yet Qur’ānic exegetes did not at all trust his powers of deduction. God actually sent down two ravens, they explained. One killed the other, and then, as an example to humankind, proceeded to bury it. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān,* commentary on verse 5:31; and al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh,* I:i, 138–139. Compare to the similar gloss of Midrash Tanḥūmā, Bereshit, cited by Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Hildesheim, 1961), 86. In “What Did Muhammed Borrow from Judaism?” in *The Origins of the Koran,* ed. Ibn Warraq, 189 and no. 171, Abraham Geiger cites Pirke Rav Eliezer, chap. 21, as a rabbinical source for the Qur’ānic story. However, *The Encyclopaedia Judaica,* “Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer,” identifies this as an eighth-century pseudoepigraphic work containing “Arabic legends.” Hence, the question of influence is unresolved.

2. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh,* I:1, 161–162; also see 143, 149–151, 163. Certain authorities disputed that Adam was the first person to die. Apparently Adam was buried in the

Treasure Cave of Mecca, where he stayed until Noah gathered his bones for a secondary burial in Jerusalem.

3. Vico, *The New Science,* trans. Thomas Bergin and Max Fisch (Ithaca, N.Y., 1968), 51, 337. In English as in Latin, the term “human” (*humanus*) relates to “inhumation” (*humo*). These terms ultimately derive from *humus,* “earth,” as noted by E. Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Amsterdam, 1971). Vico’s association of burial with humanity was predicated, of course, on this linguistic affinity. On the origins of burial, see Robert Wenke, *Patterns in Prehistory* (Oxford, 1999), 179, 195, 348; and Jared Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal* (New York, 1992), chap. 2. For a skeptical reinterpretation of the evidence, see Robert H. Gargett, “Grave Shortcomings: The Evidence for Neandertal Burial,” *Current Anthropology* 30 (1989): 157–190; note also the replies of various authorities, collated at the end of the article.

4. For a fascinating analysis of such poetry, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.,1993), chap. 2. For an overview of pre-Islamic Arab death rituals, see Mohammed Abdesselem, *Le thème de la mort dans la poésie arabe,* chap. 3. On camel sacrifices, see the poetic and the archeological evidence: Abdesselem, 101–104; Burkhard Vogt, “Death, Resurrection, and the Camel,” 278–290. On the slaughtering of camels to honor venerated heroes celebrated for their munificence, see I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies,* 1:219. On the possible role of camels in the afterlife, see Julius Wellhausen,*Reste Arabischen Heidentums* (1887; repr., Berlin, 1961), 180.

5. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, nos. 1345–1348; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘,* KJ, chap. 46. An important distinction would later be drawn between dying “in a city” (*fī miṣr*), on the one hand, and “in Byzantium” (*fī bilād al-Rūm*) or “in the house of war” (*fī dār al-ḥarb*), on the other hand. In the first case, individual burials were the norm. In the second case, due to the multiplicity of corpses, communal graves were acceptable by necessity; see Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 513.

6. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, nos. 1348 and 1351–1352. Ibid., bk. 56 (*Kitāb al-Jihād wa `l-Siyar*), no. 2845, informs us that Thābit ibn Qays prepared for the battle of the Yamāma by anointing his body with *ḥanūṭ,* an embalming perfume. In this manner, he expressed his willingness to die in battle. See al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im,* KJ, 238, on martyrs transported from a rural area (*rustāq*) to the city of Kūfa. Displeased by this act, ‘Alī declared: “Bury your dead in their battlefields.” On the subject see Michael Lecker, “On the Burial of Martyrs in Islam,” in Hiroyuki Yanagihashi, ed., *The Concept of Territory in Islamic Thought* (London, 2000), 37–49.

7. See *EI*², s.v. “Madjūs”; J. Choksy, “Zoroastrianism,” 255.

8. [Al-Sīrāfī?], *’Ahbār al-Ṣīn wa al-Hind,* 22, para. 51.

9. Ibn Faḍlān, *Risāla* (Damascus, 1959), 154–165; see also *EI*², s.v. “Rūs.”

10. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3204–3208, recommends punishments for those who let the duty slip by. See also al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Risāla, 367,* no. 995.

11. See, again, the tradition on the necessary number of intercessors for prayer to be successful, cited on p. 161 of this volume.

12. Tāj al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā* (Cairo, 1906), 1:204. On the meaning of popular attendance in Muslim funerals, see Zaman, “Death, Funeral Processions, and the Articulation of Religious Authority.”

13. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:156; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh,* 111:4, 2463.

14. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:60; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh,* 111:4, 2441–2442.

15. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:340–341. A contradictory account holds that the prayer leader on this occasion was the pietist Ibn ‘Umar.

16. Ibid., 5:148.

17. Ibid., vol. 7, pt. 2, p. 68 (with reference to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr); the preceding biographical entry mentions the caliph al-Mahdī praying at someone else’s funeral.

18. Ibid., vol. 7, pt. 2, p. 30.

19. Ibid., vol. 7, pt. 2, p. 52.

20. Ibid., 8:349. See the entry on “Sukayna bt. al-Ḥusayn” in *EI*^{2}*.*

21. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 406.

22. Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:86, 113.

23. Ibid., vol. 7, pt. 1, pp. 7–8. Massignon, “Explication du plan de Baṣra,” 162, identifies al-Bayḏā’ as Ziyād’s official residence.

24. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. i, pp. 63–64. The martyrs who had “best seized the Qur’ān” (*ayyuhum aktharu akhdhan li`l-Qur’ān*) were deposited in the grave first (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1347). Similarly, in joint burial, al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3262, privileged “the most honorable and the best of Qur’ān reciters” (*afḍaluhum wa-aqra’uhum*).

25. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt.i, pp. 151, 148.

26. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* vol. 7, pt. 1, pp. 11, 16; see p. 111 on Anas ibn Mālik leading the funeral prayer for Abū Ghallāb Yūnus ibn Jubayr al-Bāhilī.

27. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:27. See *EI*^{2}*,* s.v. “Al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays.”

28. Schacht, *Origins,* 192 and passim; Cook, *Commanding Right,* 33.

29. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh,* 111:4, 2330.

30. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh,* 111:4, 2241 and 2348; Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:53–54. See Ella Landau-Tasseron, ed. and trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (Albany, N.Y., 1998), 39:174, n. 777 (cf. 70, n. 323). A similar story holds that Abū Hurayra led the prayer over Umm Salama (d. 679), another one of the Prophet’s wives, as Medina’s governor al-Walīd ibn ‘Utba ibn Abī Sufyān had suspiciously left town on an excuse; a conflicting version holds that her nephew prayed over her bier (al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh,* 111:4, 2443). On Abū Hurayra leading the prayer at ‘Ā’isha’s funeral, see the second paragraph of chap. 5 of the present volume.

31. Mu‘āwiya I, Marwān, al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays, and other individuals referred to above figure prominently in Madelung’s *Succession to Muḥammad.* In general, on religion and politics in the early Islamic period, see Ira M. Lapidus, “State and Religion in Islamic Societies,” *Past & Present* 151 (1996): 3–4, 8–12; M. J. Kister, *Concepts and Ideas at the Dawn of Islam,* article V; P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, 1986); Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1989); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics Under the Early ‘Abbāsids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunnī Elite* (Leiden, 1997).

32. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 405–410, nos. 355–357, reviews the legal controversy in detail. One of the questions debated was whether agency over the dead functioned as *wilāyat al-nikāḥ*.

33. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 405–407, nos. 355–356; see also al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3216. Two contradictory positions were ascribed to al-Shāfi‘ī; see al-Māwardī, *Al-Ḥāwī al-kabīr,* 3: KJ, 45.

34. Ibn Rushd (Averroës), *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid,* KJ, 49. Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ,

584–586; the critical apparatus on 585, n. 6, suggests “walī” for “wālī” (the alternative chosen in the main text), and this footnoted option must be the right reading as otherwise the passage would be unintelligible.

35. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:24; al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-kubrā,* 4: KJ, 28–29; Ibn Rushd (Averroës), *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid,* KJ, 49–50.

36. Al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im,* KJ, 235; Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* 1:200, no. 474; al-Ṭūsī, *Nihāya,* 143–144; al-Ṭūsī, *Khilāf,* KJ, no. 535. The Zaydi position resembles the Sunnī one in privileging the Imam and the ruler, followed by the closest pious agnate. By Ibn al-Murtaḍā, see *Kitāb al-Azhār fī fiqh al-a’imma al-aṭhār* (Beirut, 1973), KJ, 58; and *al-Baḥr al-Zakhkhār,* KJ, 114–115. An Ibāḍi Kharijite grants the *walī al-jināza* priority, provided he knows how to pray expertly, and empowers in the second place the *Imām al-Ṣalāh.* See Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:222–223.

37. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 408.

38. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3216b.

39. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 408–409.

40. Al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl,* 1:423.

41. Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 582–583. According to Ibn al-Qāsim, quoted in this source, if a woman’s son designated someone else to lead the prayer, the candidate could not claim priority over her male agnates.

42. See Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 408. Compare Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Athār,* no. 392 to 394; and also to al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl,* 1:423. It is interesting to see how, in this case, the Ḥanafite position eventually diverged from the early Kūfan position. See ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6374, for an interesting report on a contest between Abū Bakr and his brothers-in-law over prayer for the deceased wife/sister. Abū Bakr claims the right to pray, but it is not clear if he does so as husband or as commander; nos. 6370 and 6372 grant the husband the right to pray following the father but preceding the brother; no. 6375 grants the husband the highest position.

43. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 177, no. 2; Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* 1:199–200, no. 474. Al-Ṭūsī, *Nihāya,* 143–144, holds “the husband has more of a right in prayer over the woman than her brother and her father.” Idem, *Khilāf,* KJ, 720, no. 536, connects the issue to the priorities in inheritance. Similarly, see al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, *al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfi‘* (Qum, 1993), 94, where it is specified that the most entitled of the people is the one most entitled in inheritance (*mīrāth*).

44. Al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im,* KJ, 235.

45. Zayd ibn ‘Alī (attrib.), *Majmū‘ al-fiqh,* KJ, 73.

46. N. Coulson’s *Succession in the Muslim Family,* 125, has made this division clear in connection with inheritance. He concludes: “As opposed to Sunnī law, which rests upon the concept of the extended family or tribal group, Shī‘ī law rests upon the notion of the more limited or ‘nuclear’ family group consisting of parents and lineal descendants.” In general, however, the four Sunnī schools (the Mālikī included) privileged male agnates, the *‘aṣaba,* to whom Twelver Shī‘ites did not grant a special place; see 29–30, 108–110, and passim. W. Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects,* article XII, 75, 79, notes important differences between Twelver Shī‘ites, Zaidis and Ismā‘īlis with regard to inheritance laws. I have endeavored here to articulate distinctions between “different systems of male dominance,” as suggested by Deniz Kandiyoti, “Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective,” in N. Keddie and B. Baron, eds., *Women in Middle Eastern History* (New Haven, Conn., 1991), chap. 2. Nevertheless, my analysis of early Islamic traditions does not at all support Kandiyoti’s notion that the “extensive ideologization” of “the sphere of family and gender relations” is a “historical phenomenon of fairly recent origin that cannot be imputed to Islam itself.”

47. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3218–3219.

48. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 409–410; Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 188–89.

49. Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* 1:200, nos. 479; see also al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 179, no. 1.

50. Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb,* 3:332, no. 1038.

51. Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:220.

52. See Patricia Crone and Fritz Zimmermann, *The Epistle of Sālim ibn Dhakwān* (Oxford, 2001), 140, para. 127, and 180–181, n. 127. Also see Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York, 2004), 57.

53. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 410. See also Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 34.

54. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3218.

55. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra,* 2:663; Mālik, *Muwaṭṭaʾ,* KJ, no. 620.

56. Mālik, as reported by Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 453; cf. Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 590, 598. See also Zayd ibn ʿAlī (attrib.), *Majmūʿ al-fiqh,* KJ, 72; Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:223 (cf-1:214); and al-Ṭūṣī, *Tahdhīb,* 3:319, no. 989.

57. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 452–454; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ,* KJ, chap. 45, no. 1034; Abū Dā'ud, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 57, no. 3194 (on how the Imām ought to stand in front of a woman's buttocks, *ʿajīza,* if there are no biers to conceal her); al-Awzāʿī, *Sunan,* KJ, no. 770; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 174–175, no. 2. Al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 75, no. 1979; and Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* nos. 20182, 20234, 20237 (on the position of the Imam in front of the middle of a woman who died *fī nifāsihā*).

58. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1327; Mālik, *Muwaṭṭaʾ,* KJ, chap. 5, no. 606; chap. 9, no. 616. See also al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl, 1:426;* ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6328ff; al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 72, 1970–1975; Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 446.

59. See Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 423; and the citations in A. J. Wensinck's *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane,* s.v. *maqbara.*

60. For an extensive discussion on this ritual detail, see Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:211–213. On the origins of divergence over the number of praises, see Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-athār,* 79, no. 390. See also Zayd ibn ʿAlī (attrib.), *Majmūʿ al-fiqh,* KJ, 71–72; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6393ff; al-Awzāʿī. *Sunan,* KJ, no. 760; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ,* KJ, no. 76; Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* 1:198–199. Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb,* 3:316, no. 981, mentions up to eleven *takbīrāt* and specifies that due to varieties in *madhhab,* if the prayer leader does only four, then the individual may do the rest in dissimulation (*taqīya*). With respect to the man who arrives late, it was not clear whether he should follow the ritual order from the beginning, on his own, or skip the missed steps to join the Imām with the rest. On this see Mālik, *Muwaṭṭaʾ,* KJ, no. 608; al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl,* 1:424, 427–428; Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 181.

61. Al-Shaybānī, *al-Aṣl,* 1:432.

62. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭaʾ,* KJ, no. 616. See al-Ṭūṣī, *Tahdhīb,* 3:322, no. 1002; al-Ṭūṣī, *al-Nihāya,* 144: deceased women are placed closer to the *qibla* than deceased men, slaves closer than free men, and boys closer than adult men. Abū Ghānim, *Mudawwana,* 1:214, provides a qualification: if the prayer leader is the deceased woman's rather than the deceased man's Imām, then he should place her closer to him.

63. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 176, no. 3.

64. Al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan,* KJ, chaps. 74–75, nos. 1977–1978.

65. Saḥnūn, *Mudawwana,* KJ, 182; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 175, no. 6; Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 628. Alternatively, Shīʿites would invert women and children, placing the latter closest to the *qibla.* See al-Ṭūsī, *Nihāya,* 144. On the *Kitāb ʿAlī,* see Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographic Survey of Early Shīʿite Literature* (Oxford, 2003), 1:4–12.

66. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3228. Cf. Paula Sanders, “Gendering the Ungendered Body: Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law,” in Nikki R. Keddie and Edith Baron, eds., *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven, Conn., 1991), 74–95.

67. See the discussion on the behavior of ‘Atā’, in chap. 4, p. 126, of this volume.

68. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:11 (*wa-nazala … fī ḥufatihā wa lam takun yawma’idhin sunnat al-jināza al-ṣalāh*).

69. Ella Landau-Tasseron, ed. and trans., *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (Albany, N.Y., 1998), 39:11, n. 43.

70. Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 38, no. 1550.

71. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ: “Bāb al-khilāf fī idkhāl al-mayyit al-qabr,” nos. 3156–3163. Some divergence has been recorded also on the style of inserting women as opposed to men, on which see ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* KJ, no. 6468 (no. 6465ff on the ritual in general); and Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* 1:205, no. 499.

72. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra,* 2:664–665.

73. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3390. A son was entitled to lower his father into the grave, but not vice versa, according to al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 193, no. 1.

74. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3387.

75. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3392, 3247. It is difficult to know what specifically the knots (or buttons) refer to, as reference to them is infrequent. However, Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* 1:205, no. 500, relates them to unveiling the countenance. In his last testament, the caliph al-Ma’mūn asks that his shroud be unraveled from his head and feet, as reported by al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh,* III:2, 1137. See also the short entry in Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 434, no. 368.

76. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:26; al-Ṭabarī. *Ta’rīkh,* III:4, 2302 (*a-fīkum aḥadun lam yuqārif ahlahu `l-layla?);* al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1342.

77. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:202.

78. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 433.

79. This is what ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Ḥasan did, for instance, in the funeral of Zayd ibn Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī (Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 5:234). See Ignaz Goldziher, “On the Veneration of the Dead,” *Muslim Studies,* 1:222–223, for reference to scenes of Arabs tearing off their clothes in mourning, as represented by an Islamic romance, *Sīrat ‘Antar.* On tearing the garments at the breast, see the references in chap. 4, n. 8 and n. 23, of the present volume.

80. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 192, no. i; al-Ṭūsī, *Istibṣār,* KJ, chap. 124, p. 213.

81. Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 8:78–79, which includes a legalistic discussion on the qualifications for insertion; see also 5:38.

82. Ibid., 8:53.

83. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3393–3394, 3397. Similarly, Saḥnūn ruled that the husband and her *dhū maḥram* should insert her corpse, with the husband at the middle part of her body (*fī wasaṭihā*); on this, see Ibn Abī Zayd, *Nawādir,* KJ, 584, 643–44; and Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), *al-Bayān,* KJ, 273. Not surprisingly, al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 194, no. 6, grants the husband the highest right.

84. Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 432.

85. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, 1960), 146ff. Emphasized here are the “rites of separation.”

86. Ibn Shabba, *Ta’rīkh al-Madīnah* (Qum, 1989–1990), 1:96.

87. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6429.

88. On not reciting the Qur’ān in the funerary prayer, see chap. 1, n. 40 and n. 42,

above.

89. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 609.

90. The most gruesome punishment in the afterlife was reserved, according to one tradition, for the tyrannical Imam. See Abū Yūsuf *Kitāb al-Kharāj,* 3rd ed. (Cairo, 1963), 8, in a tradition related by al-Faḍl ibn Marzūq, on the authority of ‘Aṭiyya Ibn Sa‘d, on the authority of Abū Sa‘īd.

91. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3169 (*wa-lā aḥsabu hādhā min al-umūr allatī yanbaghī an yanqula fīhā aḥadun ‘alaynā);* see also 3271–3274. In al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan,* 3: KJ, 410, there is a tradition ascribed to Jābir (ibn ‘Abdallāh, d. ca. 697) stating that Muḥammad’s grave rose approximately one *shibr* from the ground.

92. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3170; see also no. 3167, where the grave of Muḥammad’s deceased son Ibrāhīm is described as *musaṭṭaḥ,* according to Muḥammad’s directions. Compare to the formulation ascribed to al-Qāsim in Abū Dā’ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 72 (*taswiyat al-qabr*), no. 3220; see also al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1390. Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* (1987), 11:143–145, no. 2401, does not give dates for Sufyān al-Tammār, yet he records that he transmitted from various authorities who died around the first two decades of the eighth century. On the legal disagreement, see Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 435–437. This particular contradiction between two oral traditions, though minor, is significant from the perspective of *ḥadīth* criticism, for we can be fairly sure that at least one of the conflicting traditions emerged after the year 709. By that time, al-Walīd’s reconstruction project had been completed and the Prophet’s tomb had been sealed, so it was no longer possible to verify empirically the precise shape of the mound.

93. Al-Ma’mūn’s last testament, al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh,* III:2, 1137, makes the connection especially clear in his command to “place me on my right side, and make me face the *qibla.”* See Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3248 (on propping the corpse on the right side, presumably for it to face the *qibla);* nos. 3157, 3241, 3262, and passim, imply Muslim corpses would face the *qibla.* Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 500, on how corpses buried without ablution or without facing the *qibla* may be exhumed if one does not fear their disintegration. Generally speaking, jurists did not actively prescribe burial in the direction of the *qibla,* taking this matter for granted. They discussed instead finer points, such as the permissibility of exhuming corpses not buried in this manner. Unusually, al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im,* KJ, 219, 237, and 238, places an emphasis on orienting both the dying and the dead in the direction of the *qibla.*

94. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra,* 2:663; Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 621; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 75; Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chaps. 39–40, nos. 1554–1558. Yūsuf Rāġib, “Structure de la tombe d’après le droit musulman,” *Arabica* 39 (1992): 393–395, compiles many references on this score.

95. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3249–3250; see also al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabsūṭ,* 2:62. Basing himself on al-Shāfi‘ī’s self-conscious reflections on legal method, J. Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence,* describes the jurist’s “systematic reasoning” and, in this light, the emergence of Muslim jurisprudence. Yet Schacht makes little effort to understand al-Shāfi‘ī’s actual reasoning on practical matters as opposed to his legal hermeneutics. Tellingly, on 315–328, Schacht discusses in a negative light several instances where al-Shāfi‘ī’s reflections on practical issues did not derive directly from his legal theory. In Schacht’s view, these were failures, demonstrating arbitrary or regressive reflections.

96. See Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī,* KJ, 513–514, no. 393.

97. Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3038. Also see Hassan S. Khalilieh, *Islamic Maritime Law: An Introduction* (Leiden, 1998), 168–171.

98. Simpson, “Death and Burial in the Late Islamic Near East,” 245.

99. F. Imbert, “La nécropole islamique de Qasṭal al-Balqā’ en Jordanie,” 20; the graves in question certainly belonged to Muslims, as has been determined by reference to the tombstone inscriptions. Lawrence Toombs, *Tell el Hesi: Modern Military Trenching and Muslim Cemetery in Field I, Strata I-II* (Waterloo, Ont., 1985), 77–80 and passim, explains that a number of anomalous burials were probably due to practical limitations; by contrast, the “crucial variant” of orientation toward Jerusalem seemed to him a “deliberate reversal.” He suggests these odd burials might have belonged to Muslims “out of favor with the community” rather than to Jews or Christians. Possibly, however, these graves belonged to Jews.

100. See Qur’ān 2:142–145 and the discussion on the abrogation of the first *qibla* in al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Risāla,* para. 359–370. Also see Uri Rubin, “The Ka‘ba: Aspects of Its Ritual Functions,” 103–104; Angelika Neuwirth, “Erste Qibla, fernstes Masǧid?—Jerusalem im Horizont der historischen Muḥammad,” in Ferdinand Hahn et al., eds, *Zion, Ort der Begegnung: Festschrift für Laurentius Klein zur Vollendung des 65. Lebensjahres* (Bodenheim, 1993), 227–270; M. J. Kister, “Sanctity Joint and Divided: On Holy Places in the Islamic Tradition,” *JSAI* 20 (1996): 18–65, at 19, 49–50, 52, 56–61; Suliman Bashear, “Qur’ān 2:114 and Jerusalem,” *BSOAS* 52 (1989): 215–238, at 215–216, 228–230, and 237; idem, “Qibla Musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches,” *The Muslim World* 81 (1991): 267–282. See also the skeptical remarks on the early history of the *qibla* by P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism,* 21–24. All of this refers to the direction of prayer, not burial.

101. K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt* (New York, 1979), 1:110–111. See also Oleg Grabar, “The Earliest Islamic Commemorative Structures, Notes and Documents,” *Ars Orientalis* 6 (1966): 7–46. Cf. Yūsuf Rāġib, “Les premiers monuments funéraires de l’Islam,” *AI* 9 (1970): 3–36; idem, “Les sanctuaires des gens de la famille dans la cité des morts au Caire,” *Rivista degli studi orientali* 51 (1977): 47–76; Abbas Daneshvari, *Medieval Tomb Towers of Iran: An Iconographic Study* (Lexington, Ky., 1986), 1–8, 13, and passim. Th. Leisten, “Between Orthodoxy and Exegesis,” 19–22, suggests that the demolitions of the unclaimed tombs of Mecca (referred to by al-Shāfi‘ī) were justified by the principle of leveling all tombs to the ground. This may be the case, but other possibilities come to mind: perhaps Meccans needed to make space in their burial grounds for the recently deceased, or maybe they were eager to destroy tombs not facing the Ka‘ba. Significantly, al-Shāfi‘ī did not mention any of these reasons. He found the government’s razing justified simply because ownership of the tombs had not been established; see al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3275–3280. On the early ‘Abbasid necropolis, see Roland-Pierre Gayraud et al., “Isṭabl ‘Antar (Fostat) 1994: Rapport de Fouilles,” *AI* 29 (1995): 1–6.

102. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh,* II:2, 1192–1194 (source of the quotation); and Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 1:180–182, 8:119–120. Al-Samhūdī, *Khulāṣat al-Wafā* (Medina, 1998), 2:105–148, provides an extensive account both of the original structures and of the work of reconstruction; his account is invaluable, as it cites early sources that have not survived independently. In general, for an architectural history of the shrine that also highlights its religious significance, see Sh. Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries,* 31–53. Jean Sauvaget, *La Mosquée omeyyade de Médine* (Paris, 1947), 89–90, discusses the tomb of Muḥammad and in general the Umayyad constructions; see also K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture,* 2nd ed., vol. 1, pt. 1 (New York, 1979), 6–11, 27–28, and 142–149. On the potential Byzantine role, see H. A. R. Gibb, “Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate,” in his *Studies on the Civilization of Islam,* ed. S. J. Shaw and W. R. Polk (London, 1962), 47–61, at 52ff ; and Andreas Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus: Gesandtschaften und Verträge zwischen Kaisern und Kalifen, 639–750; Untersuchungen zum Gewohnheits-Völkerrecht und zur interkulturellen Diplomatie* (Berlin, 1996), 167–181. The third explanation for the provenance of the mosaics was

suggested to me by the passage in al-Ṭabarī. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb,* 2:198–199, provides conflicting dates for the death of Ṣāliḥ, ranging from ca. 750 to ca. 757.

103. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1390.

104. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh,* II:2, 1192–1194, does not mention any crying or controversy surrounding the edict and appears rather to celebrate the event; by contrast, see Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt,* 1:180–182, 8:119–120. “The destruction of cultural memory” is a phrase borrowed from the 2001 presidential address of R. Stephen Humphreys, delivered at the annual conference of the Middle East Studies Association.

105. Al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rīkh,* ed. M. Houtsma (Leiden, 1969), 2:339–340. The Qur’ānic verse is 49:4. Ibn Ḥajar’s *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb,* 1:540, gives 93 AH (711 CE) as the date for Khubayb’s death. However, according to al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh,* the razing of the chambers took place in 88 AH (707 CE), and according to al-Ya‘qūbī, reconstruction was completed by 90 AH (709 CE). Thus, if Khubayb died as described, then this happened between 707 and 709.

106. Ibn Shabba’s account is cited by al-Samhūdī, *Khulāṣat al-Wafā,* 2:128–129. Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl,* 26:636–639, no. 5690, identifies Abū Ghassān as one of Ibn Shabba’s informants. See the remarks by Grabar, “Earliest Islamic Commemorative Structures,” 8.

107. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh,* 11:2, 1193; al-Samhūdī, *Khulāṣat al-Wafā,* 2:114. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture,* 1:147–148.

108. Al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Kitāb al-ḥawādith wa al-bida‘,* ed. ‘A. M. Turkī (Beirut, 1990), 304, no. 274; Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtiḍā’ al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm,* ed. M. al-Fiqī, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1950), 338, 364–365, 367, and passim. See Kister, “Sanctity Joint and Divided,” 39–41, on the religious significance of Muḥammad’s grave, which he says “was considered to surpass in virtue the sanctity of the Ka‘ba.” M. Schöller, *Epitaphs in Context,* 45–50 and 67–79, discusses pilgrimage to the site of Muḥammad’s sepulcher as well as Ibn Taymiyya’s condemnation.

109. Al-Samhūdī, *Khulāṣat al-Wafā,* 2:128–132.

110. Al-Samhūdī, *Khulāṣat al-Wafā,* 2:142–144, surveys the debate on the positions of the three tombs. In addition, there was no certainty about the shape of the original tomb; on this see M. Schöller, *Epitaphs in Context,* 192–198.

111. The story about the Byzantine emperor’s gift, coupled with the use of eastern Christian mosaics in a monumental Marwanid building, might have served as a nice illustration of what Garth Fowden has called the “Islamic Commonwealth,” in his book *Empire to Commonwealth.*

7. The Torture of Spirit and Corpse in the Grave

1. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-mawt,* 45–48, no. 70. I have translated the angels' response, *lā darayta wa-lā talayta,* as "May you not know." On this expression, see Lane, *Lexicon,* 1:84.

2. Similarly, historians of the body in early and medieval Christianity have turned to the theme of death and the resurrection for insight. In *Resurrection of the Body,* Caroline Walker Bynum argues that Christian images of the Resurrection reflect primarily a concern with the continuation of personal identity during a period of bodily transformation. See also Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York, 1988) 74, 111, 199, 222–224, 382–384, 441–442.

3. The development of orthodox and mystical ideas about *al-barzakh* was the subject of Ragnar Eklund's intriguing dissertation, *Life Between Death and Resurrection According to Islam.* Eklund traced the development of beliefs about *al-qabr* (the grave) and *al-barzakh* with learning and subtlety, especially concerning discrepancies of genre. However, his thesis about the development of a temporal notion of *al-barzakh* within orthodoxy and of a spatial notion within mysticism was somewhat misguided. Generally, interpretations of *al-barzakh* had both a spatial and a temporal component—there was a certain ambiguity inherent in this dimension of space-time.

4. Cf. Saul Lieberman, "Aspects of After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature," 497–498.

5. Reference to an obstacle or partition (*ḥājiz*) between the two seas, in Qur'ān 27:61 (cf. 35:1), is also worth examining in light of *al-barzakh.*

6. Gibbon explained in a footnote that the Qur'ānic version of the Christian fable showed Mahomet's ingenuity at work in the invention of the dog. See *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York, n.d.), chap. 33, n. 46. On the doubtful number of sleepers, see Qur'ān 18:21.

7. Omitted from this analysis is reference to Qur'ān 18:32–45, which is not so much a parable as an allegory in which the notion of *al-barzakh* plays no evident role. The Qur'ānic text itself, not its interpretation by Muslims, is under discussion here. Readers interested in the exegesis of *Sūra* 18 by al-Ṭabarī and others should turn to Paolo Dall'Oglio, *Speranza nell'Islâm: Interpretazione della prospettiva escatologica di Corano XVIII* (Genova, 1991). On the exegesis of Qur'ān 18:60–82, with special emphasis on its creative adaptation of Jewish, Christian, and ancient Mesopotamian motifs, see Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (London, 2002), 10–36.

8. Charles C. Torrey, "The Jewish Foundation of Islam," in Ibn Warraq, ed. *The Origins of the Koran* (Amherst, Mass., 1998), 346, n. 31, cites Pseudo-Callisthenes as the source on the fish. Cf. Wheeler, *Moses,* 11ff.

9. Cf. M. Causse, "The Theology of Separation and the Theology of Community: A Study of the Prophetic Career of Moses According to the Qur'ān," trans. Gwendolin Goldbloom, in Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Qur'an: Style and Contents* (Aldershot, 2001), 37–60, at 49. Causse writes that "God's actions can only be understood after the event," but argues essentially that the story displays a "commitment in which knowledge is discernible."

10. Frank Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy* is insightful on the deliberate obscurity of scriptural parables. A. Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary,* 77, suggests the Arabicized term *al-barzakh* derives from the Persian *farsakh* or *parasang,* a measure of distance. On the Qur'ān's polemical insistence on clarity, see Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies,* 98–99. On "parabolical" or ambiguous verses creating a barrier between believers and perverse interpreters, see Leah Kinberg, "*Muḥkamāt* and

Mutashābihāt (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis," *Arabica* 35 (1988): 143–172, at 157–160. On the confusion of the believer in confronting obscure verses, see Michel Lagarde, "De l'Ambiguïté (mutašābih) dans le Coran: Tentatives d'explication des exégètes musulmans," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 3 (1985): 45–62, at 49–50.

11. Unsurprisingly in Muslim literature, Gog and Magog appear intent on crashing through an apocalyptic barrier; on this, see David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic,* 185. Following L. Massignon, Norman O. Brown has argued that *Sūra* 18 is "the apocalypse of Islam." He appreciated in particular the tension between descriptions of external reality and esoteric revelations; see his article "The Apocalypse of Islam," in Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Qur'an: Style and Contents* (Aldershot, 2001), 355–380. I thank Bruce Fudge for this reference.

12. I have here made use of stock eschatological imagery, on which see Qur'ān 20:105–107, 21:104, 27:87–88, 39:67, 52:10, 56:5–14, 69:14–16, 73:14–18, 78:19–20, 79:14, 84:1–2. It is unclear how the breaking of the Ma'rib Dam in the Yemen resonated with Qur'ānic visions of the end of days. This momentous event in Arabian history appeared as a sign of God's power to punish the ungrateful, replacing their pleasant gardens with bitter fruit; see Qur'ān 34:16.

13. Cf. Qur'ān 6:61. Alford Welch, "Death and Dying in the Qur'ān," in F. Reynolds and E. Waugh, eds., *Religious Encounters with Death* (University Park, Md., 1977), 189. Welch rightly suggests that the command *akhrijū anfusakum* ("Give up your souls!") contradicts the normal Qur'ānic understanding of self (*nafs*) as a whole being and not merely a spiritual entity within the body.

14. See O'Shaughnessy, *Muhammad's Thoughts on Death,* 44–49 and 27, on the use of *qaddara* in reference to death.

15. The subject explored here is the death of ordinary men or women, not the "death" of martyrs. Martyrs begin an afterlife in the Garden immediately after death, though "you do not perceive it." See Qur'ān 2:154, 3:169, 2:156, 37:59, 44:56, 2:28, 40:11. O'Shaughnessy, *Muhammad's Thoughts on Death,* 14–15, 21–25, 32–35, deals with the confusing and interesting passages alluding to two lives and two deaths. Certain Qur'ānic notions of death must remain obscure until God throws the dead out of their graves; see Qur'ān 100:9–10.

16. See Qur'ān 5:92 and I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies,* 1:211–217. For a sense of the pre-Islamic cult of the dead, see T. E. Homerin, "Echoes of a Thirsty Owl: Death and Afterlife in Pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry," 165–184; and B. Vogt, "Death, Resurrection, and the Camel," 278–290.

17. On this literature, see the fascinating, unabashed article by Aziz al-Azmeh, "Rhetoric for the Senses: A Consideration of Muslim Paradise Narratives," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 27 (Leiden, 1995): 215–231. Also see E. Kohlberg, "Medieval Muslim Views on Martyrdom," 289–293. On ritual purity in Paradise, see A. K. Reinhart, "The Here and the Hereafter in Islamic Religious Thought," in S. Blair and J. M. Bloom, eds., *Images of Paradise in Islamic Art* (Hanover, N.H., 1991), 18.

18. On this subject, see Sarah Stroumsa, "True Felicity: Paradise in the Thought of Avicenna and Maimonides," *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 4 (Leiden, 1998): 51–77. For a philosophical treatise on the human condition after the separation of spirit from body, see Everett Rowson, *Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and Its Fate: Al-'Āmirī's Kitāb al-Amad 'alā l-abad* (New Haven, Conn., 1988); 100–101, on the wise man's efforts to free rational soul from body.

19. This journey would be described in great detail in the imaginative literature of the eleventh and twelfth centuries: *Al-Durra al-fākhira fī 'ulūm al-ākhira,* possibly written by the famous theologian al-Ghazālī, and the *Kitāb shajarat al-yaqīn,* of uncertain authorship but tentatively attributed to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 1203).

But already in the ninth-century fictions of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā we find all the basic elements of the quest. In fact, there are only two notable differences between the ninth-and the twelfth-century versions. First, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā relates a series of overlapping short stories without trying to establish a grand narrative. Second, he tells the stories without apology. Unlike his followers, he does not grapple with theological definitions about the nature of spirit after death.

20. Al-Suyūt.ūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 138–142, collects a number of scattered traditions on this topic.

21. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-mawt,* nos. 115–120; idem, *Morality in the Guise of Dreams: A Critical Edition of Kitāb al-Manām,* ed. Leah Kinberg (Leiden, 1994): nos. 6, 9–12. Cf. John Macdonald, “The Twilight of the Dead,” *Islamic Studies* 4 (1965): 60–63.

22. On angels pouncing on the deceased, see p. 125 of this volume.

23. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 232, no. 1, also records that the dead person “knows his washer.” See also al-Bukhārī, *īaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1380.

24. Ibn Abi al-Dunya, *Kitdb al-mawt,* no. 120.

25. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 52 (*qawl al-mayyit wa-huwa ‘ala l-jindza: qaddimuni*), no. 1316.

26. Aristotle, *De Anima,* ed. and trans. R. D. Hicks (New York, 1976), II, chap. 2, 413b 24–27, and III, chap. 4., 429a 10–b5.

27. Cf. Graham, “Islam in the Mirror of Ritual,” 70.

28. Abrogated practices are an exception to this rule. Note the distinction Abū Dā’ūd made between Muḥammad’s habit of washing his body after handling corpses and the practice (‘*amal*) to be followed by Muslims. See p. 73 of this volume.

29. Al-Fiqh al-Akbar II, art. 23, in A. Wensinck, *Muslim Creed,* 195, 235–236. See also R. M. Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ash‘arite School* (Durham, N.C., 1994), 55–67; and al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 173.

30. John Macdonald, “The Preliminaries to the Resurrection and Judgment,” *Islamic Studies* 4 (1965): 150–163, and idem, “Twilight of the Dead,” 70–74 and C-4, contains interesting discussions on the place of spirit after death but on the basis of a late medieval manuscript. See also Jane Smith, “The Understanding of *Nafs* and *Rūḥ* in Contemporary Muslim Considerations of the Nature of Sleep and Death,” *Muslim World* 69 (1979): 151–162. For rather technical definitions of soul, spirit, and self, see Duncan Macdonald, “The Development of the Idea of Spirit in Islam,” *Moslem World* 22 (1932): 25–42; and A. Tritton, “Man, *Nafs, Rūḥ,‘Aql,” BSOAS* 34 (1971): 491–495.

31. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 638. Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 63, nos. 1616–1617, cites two versions of the tradition that concerns the breaking of a dead man’s bones. See also the commentary in al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, nos. 3267–3269.

32. Compare Qur’ān 30:52 and 27:80 to 35:22. In these verses, God may well have had in mind the living whose ears were deaf to Muḥammad’s message (thus they were as if dead), rather than actual corpses. Even so, the assumption is that the dead cannot hear.

33. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 67 (“The dead person hears the tapping of their sandals,” *al-mayyit yasma‘u khaft al-ni‘āl*), no. 1338.

34. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1370; see also no. 1371; bk. 64, no. 4026. Eventually, the view that the dead cannot speak would suffer revision when it became clear that the dead do tell their stories, on which see Leah Kinberg, “Interaction Between This World and the Afterworld,” 290. The rabbis hold that the dead hear “what is said about them in their presence” before their tombs are sealed, according to one opinion, or before the flesh wastes away from their body, according

to another authority. On this see Lieberman, “Aspects of After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature,” 506.

35. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 64, nos. 3979–3981. In this tradition, ‘À’isha cites Qur’ān 30:52 and 35:22, upholding the notion that corpses cannot hear. This point of discrepancy between the Qur’ān and the *Ḥadīth* became a *locus classicus* of early *Ḥadīth* criticism. Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb Ta’wīl mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1982), 144 and 146, endeavored to reconcile the contradictory statements by reading the Qur’ān metaphorically.

36. Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6756. For the political context, see Kennedy, *Age of the Caliphates,* 102–108.

37. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1374.

38. For a description of the angels, see Eklund, *Life Between Death and Resurrection According to Islam,* 36–37.

39. Al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 170.

40. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 240, no. 12; and 241, no. 15.

41. See al-Suyūt.ī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr, 1*79, 182, 195. There were a few dissenting voices, holding that a corpse may be questioned without a spirit or a spirit without a corpse, on which see the discussion in al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 201–202, moral distinction 10.

42. Al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 180–181, citing al-Khallāl, *Sharḥ al-Sunna,* on a pious spirit rising to the uppermost heavens after the inquisition of the angels. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6750, indicates it is forbidden for a soul to leave (its corpse in the grave?) until it knows whether it is headed for the Garden or the Fire.

43. On the grave addressing its occupant, see Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr,* no. 100. Also see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 241–242, *“mā yanṭuqu bihi mawḍi‘ al-qabr;”* al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr*

44. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā ”ulūm al-dīn,* bk. 40, chap. 7, offers three very interesting ways of explaining the reality of unobservable punishments in the grave. These punishments take place not in the physical world, but in a higher spiritual realm (*malakūt*). See also Leor Halevi, “The Theologian’s Doubts: Natural Philosophy and the Skeptical Games of Ghazali,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002): 19–39.

45. For restrictions on the use of fire, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, bk. 56, nos. 3016–17, cf. bk. 64, no. 4111.

46. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, KJ, no. 1379. In the morning and afternoon, the deceased is shown his place in Paradise or Hell. Then he is told, “This is your place until God quickens you on the Day of the Resurrection” (*hādhā maq‘aduka ḥattā yab‘athaka `llāh ilā yawm al-qiyāma*). As this formulation is confusing, I have suggested a possible reading in the text. Another possibility is that the dead person has two homes between death and the resurrection: one in the grave, the other either in the Fire or in the Garden. If so, what the person in the grave is shown is the actual place where his alter-ego currently dwells. Note, however, the slightly different formulation in ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6745, which lends support to the interpretation offered in the text.

47. See, for instance, al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 16, no. 1052; KJ, nos. 1407 and 1386.

48. See Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth,* 218–219.

49. Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Tawahhum* (*Une vision humaine des fins dernières*), ed. and trans. André Roman (Paris, 1978), 171–179.

50. A Persian poem on the old woman in Paradise is quoted by K. Reinhart, “The Here and the Hereafter,” 21. On visions of death, Paradise, and fiery union with God,

see Margaret Smith, *Rābi‘a the Mystic,* 40–41, 69–72, 177–178. Western European travelers to Muslim lands commented on the absence of women from Paradise. See Jane I. Smith, “Old French Travel Accounts of Muslim Beliefs Concerning the Afterlife,” in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and W. Zaidan Haddad, eds., *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville, Fla., 1995), 230–232. Concerning Paradise’s ephebes, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, “Intoxication and Immortality: Wine and Associated Imagery in al-Ma‘arrī’s Garden,” in J. W. Wright Jr. and Everett K. Rowson, eds., *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York, 1997), 210–232.

51. Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism,* xi, 7, 22–34, 79, 99–104, 114, 177. One of the groups of Persians who spearheaded the *shu‘ūbīya* movement called itself the *ahl al-taswiyah,* “the people advocating equality” between Arabs and Persians. In “The Shu‘ūbīya Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran,” *IJMES* 7 (1976): 161–182, Roy Mottahedeh has shown that however egalitarian the origins of this movement, it was eventually directed at a “parity of honor among the upper classes of two distinct peoples.” Its exponents favored the establishment of a social hierarchy based on religiosity (*dīn*) rather than tribal genealogy (*nasab*). In this context, see also C. Van Arendonk and W. Graham, *EI*^{2}*,* s.v. “Sharif,” which also points to the hierarchical side of early Islamic society.

52. Cited and analyzed by G. H. A. Juynboll, *Studies on the Origins,* chap. 6, 363. See also Kinberg, “Compromise of Commerce,” 199–200.

53. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr,* nos. 3, 104; idem, *Kitāb al-Manām,* nos. 89, 307.

54. Eklund, *Life Between Death and Resurrection According to Islam,* 82.

55.‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* (Beirut, 1999), 3:267, item 3083, locates *al-barzakh* between *baḥr fāris wa al-rūm.* Curiously, exegetes quoted by al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān,* commentary on Qur’ān 18:60, locate the junction visited by Moses (*majma‘ al-baḥrayn*) in the very same place. Their down-to-earth interpretation does not take into consideration the fact that Moses made a journey to a distant land where wondrous things happen to fish. Nevertheless, it lends outside support to the association drawn earlier between the Qur’ānic *al-barzakh* and the land visited by Moses. The tenth-century urban specialist al-Maqdisī contended that al-Shām, Syria, was “the place of meeting of the two seas,” but his was an unusual gloss; see Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together,* 118 and 416, n. 151.

56. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 242, no. 3.

57. Mujāhid (attrib.), *Tafsīr* (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 2, commentary on Qur’ān 23:100: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān announced, with Ādam (ibn Abī Iyās) relating from al-Mubārak ibn Faḍāla (d. 782), on the authority of al-Hasan (al-Basrī, d. 728). Cf. Mona Zaki, “Barzakh,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’dn,* ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden, 2001–2006), 1:205.

58. A search for the term by CD-ROM (Harf Info. Tech., *Mawsū ‘at al-ḥadīth al-sharīf 2.1,* Cairo, 1988) yielded no hits; A. Wensinck’s *Concordance* lacks an entry on it. On the basis of late medieval evidence and making the presumption of continuity, Eklund, *Life Between Death and Resurrection According to Islam,* 22, 33, 38, 45, argues that *‘adhāb al-qabr* and *‘adhāb al-barzakh* were basically interchangeable, signifying one and the same thing in the different genres of *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr.* But why did Sunnī traditions not refer explicitly to *al-barzakh*? Perhaps, in the view of *hadīth* collectors, the Qur’ānic term *al-barzakh* did not convey properly the early Islamic beliefs in the interregnum of the grave. Certainly, a great leap of the imagination was required to associate *al-qabr* with the Qur’ānic *al-barzakh.*

59. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* no. 454.

60. Note, however, that mention of *al-barzakh* does occur in traditionist texts, despite the absence of the term in the Sunni Tradition. In a discussion on “the torture

of the grave,” Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth,* 144, mentions that human beings “will be punished after death in *al-barzakh.”*

61. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chap. 86, relates four instances of *‘adhāb* in the Qur’ān (6:93, 9:101, 40:45–46) to *‘adhāb al-qabr.*

62. Jarīr ibn ‘Aṭiyya, *Sharḥ Dīwān* (Cairo, 1934), 279, line 7.

63. Al-Rabī‘ ibn Ḥabīb (attrib.), *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ: Musnad al-Imām* (Beirut, 1995), nos. 487–488, 812–815; Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa’,* KJ, no. 610; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, nos. 6461, 6737–6760.

64. Al-Māturīdī (attrib.), “Sharḥ Al-Fiqh al-Akbar,” in *al-Rasā’il al-sab‘a fī al-‘aqā’id,* 3rd ed. (Hyderabad, 1980), 21; Abū Ḥanīfa (attrib.), “al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ,” included in *al-‘Ālim wa al-muta‘allim,* ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo, 1949), 52. See also A. Wensinck, *Muslim Creed,* 104, 117–121; M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford, 1998), 195, 198.

65. Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth,* 144–146, 221–222, quotes traditions showing that Muḥammad himself sought to be spared the punishment of the tomb.

66. Al-Ash‘arī (d. 935), *Maqalāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn,* ed. Helmut Ritter (Istanbul, 1929–1933), 1:127, 2:430.

67. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6751, is a tradition predicting that a group of people will emerge to disavow the punishment in the tomb. See Michael Cook, “Anan and Islam: The Origins of Karaite Scripturalism,” *JSAI* 9 (1987): 178.

68. I speak here of an “archaic” tradition and a historical development in traditionist views because it is obvious that the tradition ascribed to ‘Ā’isha challenging the moral validity of linking wailing to the torture of the grave arose *after* the traditions that drew this link. The traditions that associated the punishment of the grave with personal religious faults (based on one’s *‘amal* or *dhanb*) may have emerged after the traditions that associated the punishment with wailing. On traditions linking wailing and torture, and on ‘Ā’isha’s challenge, see p. 125 and p. 137 of the present volume. Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth,* 219–223, discusses the (apparent) contradiction between Qur’ānic passages and the tradition linking tortures to wailing; in this context, he mentions also the alternative traditions linking slander (*ghiba*) or urine (*bawl*) to the punishment of “the negligent Muslim” (*al-Muslim al-muqaṣṣir*).

69. See al-Suyūt.ī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr,* 160–162. The obedient believer gains an exemption from various punishments in the grave but does feel the pressure of the grave. At the same time, the continued duration (*dawām*) of this punishment varies for Muslims and infidels.

70. For this expression, see Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr,* no. 33.

71. Ibn Qutayba, *Ta’wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth,* 144.

72. Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 65, no. 1636: *inna ‘llāh ḥarrama ‘ala `l-arḍ an ta’kula ajsād al-anbiya’*

73. Ibn Māja, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 62, no. 1615: *man māta mariḍan māta shahīdan, wa-wuqiya fitnata `l-qabr wa-ghudiya wa-rīḥa ‘alayhi bi-rizqihi mina `l-janna.* The first drop of blood saves a martyr from the torture of the grave, according to al-Rabī‘ ibn Ḥabīb (attrib.), *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ,* no. 814. al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr,* 204–208, mentions a few but not all categories of martyrdom by proxy.

74. Al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr,* 207.

75. Al-Bukhārī, *ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 60, nos. 3542, 3478–3479.

76. Abū Dā’ūd, *Sunan,* KJ, chap. 1, nos. 3089–3090; al-Bukhārī, *Sahīh,* KJ, chap. 91, no. 1381. These traditions do not concern directly the torture of the grave, yet they serve to illustrate the idea that suffering serves as expiation.

77. Muḥammad would pray: *“Allāhumma innī aʿūdhu bika min ʿadhāb al-qabr. …”* See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1377; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* 1: no. 2667, 6: no. 18637, 10: no. 25706. Ibn Qutayba cited other instances; see n. 65, above.

78. Regarding the two individuals punished for urine and slander, not for any great sin, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, nos. 1361, 1378, (*wa-mā yuʿadhdhabāni fīkabīr);* al-Rabīʿ ibn Ḥabīb (attrib.), *al-Jāmiʾ al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* no. 487. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6755, includes an interesting variant, associating the torture with eating “the flesh of people” (*luḥūm al-nās*). This does not refer literally to cannibalism but metaphorically to spying or backbiting gossip, as in Qurʾān 49:12 (my thanks to Walid Saleh for this reference). On the connection between flogging and ritual impurity, see al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 249, 228. A. Kevin Reinhart, “Impurity/No Danger,” 10, 21, argues that there are no severe consequences to being impure, according to the logic of the Islamic system of ritual purity. “What’s wrong with being impure?” he asks, and concludes provocatively, “Nothing at all.” In this fine argument, Reinhart does not consider the effects after death of a failure to follow the laws of ritual purification. The evidence cited here suggests that while there was nothing wrong with being impure, there was something wrong with praying in a state of impurity.

79. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr,* no. 65.

80. Al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 292. On punishing Muslims with questions, even after they give the right answers, see ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6737. On whether or not “infidels” are questioned, compare Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth,* 222–223; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6757; and al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 235, no. 1. See also al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-sudūr,* 199, moral distinction 5. Jābir ibn Abdallāh (d. ca. 697) declared that the community of Muslims, the *umma,* would be tried in the graves; see ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6744.

81. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* vol. 9, no. 24691; cf. 24549, where the punishment in the grave is related to one’s sins (*dhanb);* and 24356, where punishment in the afterlife (not necessarily within the grave) is related to one’s offenses (*jurm*). Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, ad loc. chap. 81, reports that Ibn ʿUmar had a tent (*fusṭāṭ*) removed from the grave of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān because “his works alone should shade him” (*fa-innamā yuẓilluhu ʿamaluhu*). Note also that in the anecdotes of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *ʿAmal* functions in the grave to defend the corpse from torture, its effectiveness depending simply on the measure of one’s good deeds. It may be worth noting, finally, that in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 231–232, *Māl* and *Walad,* Property and Children, appear along with *ʿAmal,* Works, in bringing the dead to account.

82. Mālik, *Muwaṭṭaʾ,* KJ, no. 637. Curiously, by Mālik’s time, the original term used, *al-mukhtafī,* required translation to *nabbāsh.* Pre-Islamic Arab tombstones frequently contain curses (and even fines) against thieves and other potential violators of a tomb; see John F. Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus* (Leiden, 2001), 173. Muslim epitaphs, by contrast, rarely address thieves; see R. Hoyland, “Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions,” 82.

83. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr,* no. 72.

84. In addition to the tradition of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā cited and quoted in the introductory section, see *Kitāb al-mawt,* nos. 115–116, and *Kitāb al-qubūr,* nos. 68, 65, and 94. See also ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6752. In conversations between the living and the dead, the latter are often asked what deed it is that they have found to be the best or most worthwhile. See Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Manām,* nos. 26, 28, 74, 75.

85. It is difficult to determine the precise reasons for early Muʿtazilite and Khārijite opposition to *ʿadhāb al-qabr.* The opposition was likely based in part on the

discerning, judgmental view that in the afterlife, humanity would be sharply divided into two groups, grave sinners and the Muslim elect, whose doom or salvation was guaranteed. No room was made for a third group, sinners who might be rehabilitated between death and the resurrection by means of torture or God's mercy. Early Mu‘tazilite and Khārijite opposition was also likely based on a scripturalist approach to religion. Scripturalists, who found no Qur'ānic basis for *‘adhāb al-qabr,* would have found unconvincing the traditionist gloss *of ‘adhāb* as *‘adhāb al-qabr.* On reward and punishment after death, as formulated in opposition to Khārijite and Mu‘tazilite views, see al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā qawāṭi‘ al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i‘tiqād* (Baghdad, 1950), 381–395. Note, however, that this discussion does not concern specifically the torture of the grave but more generally "the promise and the threats" concerning the afterlife. On scripturalist opposition to *‘adhāb al-qabr,* see Cook, "‘Anan and Islam," 177–178.

86. For the Muslim free of sins, the torture of the grave serveṣ as a trial (*miḥnd*) and as "an exposure to the [next, higher] stage" (*ta‘rīḍ an li‘l-daraja);* for the infidel, it serveṣ as a penalty (*‘uqūba*) and a warning example (*nakāl*). See Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak, *Muğarrad Maqālāt al-Aš‘arī,* ed. Daniel Gimaret (Beirut, 1987), 170; see also Daniel Gimaret, *La doctrine d'al-Ash‘arī* (Paris, 1990), 504.

87. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ibn Aḥmad al-Qāḍī (attrib.), *Daqā'iq al-akhbār fī dhikr al-jannah wa al-nār* (Beirut, 1984), 35; John Macdonald, "Preliminaries to the Resurrection," E-11, 172–173. Note, however, that Macdonald attributeṣ the same text to Abī ‘l-Layth al-Samarqandī. *"Sijn,"* or prison, may refer to *Sijjīn,* a hellish valley in or beneath the seventh earth.

88. In "Barzakh," *EI*², B. Carra de Vaux claims the "analogy" between *al-barzakh* and "the Christian idea of Purgatory" is "inaccurate"—without explaining why—and proposes translating the term as "limbo." However, Christians had not one but many ideas about purgatorial tortures, and these changed over time. Some of these ideas were certainly analogous to Muslim ideas about life between death and the resurrection. The real question is whether the analogous systems were simply parallel or interconnected historically. "Limbo," in my view, serves as an accurate rendering *of al-barzakh* only when no punishment in the grave is implied.

89. Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), *Epistola sulla vita futura (al-Risāla al-aḍḥawiyya fī al-ma‘ād*), ed. and trans. Francesca Lucchetta (Padua, 1969), 207–213. Note that here Avicenna links *al-barzakh* only to "perfect but impure" souls: "perfect and pure" as well as "imperfect and pure" souls seem not to dwell in *al-barzakh.* Cf. G. C. Anawati, "La mort en Islam," *Studia Missionalia 31* (1982): 201–202. For a thought-provoking argument linking Avicenna's theory of the perfection of the rational soul to Avicenna's ideas about the soul's causal relation to the body, see Robert Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003), chap. *6.* Needless to say, the perfect soul cannot continue to operate as the final cause of corporeal motion after the death of the body. Perhaps the reason for This is that in Avicenna's thinking, the rational soul does not need a body "to perform its own proper activity" once it has "reached its first perfection." For This explanation, see Thérèse-Anne Druart, "The Human Soul's Individuation and Its Survival After the Body's Death: Avicenna on the Causal Relation between Body and Soul," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10 (2000): 262.

90. Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory,* 134.

91. Ibid., 198–199, 202.

92. In This context, it is worth noting that Jacques Le Goff's *The Birth of Purgatory,* 186, dismisses the possibility of Muslim eschatological influence on the vision of Purgatory by Alberic of Settefrati of Monte Cassino because "there seems to be nothing in Muslim doctrine that might correspond to Purgatory." But if the Christian spatial imagination about *purgatorium* did not begin to develop until the twelfth

century, as Le Goff argues, it would be worthwhile to examine the possibility of *al-barzakh* acting as a stimulus. The different though obviously related question of Muslim influence on Dante's eschatology was taken up enthusiastically by Miguel Asin Palacios, *La Escatología musulmana en la "Divina Comedia"* (Madrid, 1919; rev. ed., 1943); and more soberly by E. Cerulli, *Il "libro della Scala" e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina Commedia* (Città del Vaticano, 1970); and *Nuove ricerche sul Libro della scala e la conoscenza dell' Islam in Occidente* (Città del Vaticano, 1972).

93. Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History and The Martyrs of Palestine,* trans. H. Lawlor and J. Oulton (New York, 1927), 1:203, VI.37; Liguori G. Mūller, *The De Haeresibus of Saint Augustine: A Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Washington, D.C., 1956), 116–119.

94. Aphraate Le Sage Persan, *Les Exposés,* trans. Marie-Joseph Pierre (Paris, 1988), 1:401, 6:14 (I/293–296) and 1:465, 8:19 (I/397); author's comments on 191–199. See also F. Gavin, "The Sleep of the Soul in the Early Syriac Church," *JAOS* 40 (1920): 103–120; Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body,* 72–75.

95. 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa* (Beirut: Dār al-'Arabiyya, 1966), 1:187; Gabriel Said Reynolds, "A Medieval Islamic Polemic Against Certain Practices and Doctrines of the East Syrian Church: Introduction, Excerpts, and Commentary," in David Thomas, ed., *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq* (Leiden, 2003), 223–225.

96. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, no. 1372.

97. Ibid., bk. 16, nos. 1049, 1050, 1053, 1055.

98. See *The Jewish Encyclopedia,* s.v. "Ḥibbuṭ ha-Ḥeber," 6:385, citing minor rather than classical *midrashim;* and *EI²,* s.v., "'Adhāb al-Qabr." See Michael Cook, "'Anan and Islam," 179, on Geonic-Karaite controversy regarding the punishment of the tomb. The Talmudic references given are: *BT Sanhedrin* 47b, *Berakoth* 18b, and *Shabbath* 13b. Finally, see Lieberman, "Aspects of After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature," 500–503, 506–509. On 507, Lieberman argues that "the suffering of the dead body in the grave partly atones for the sins committed in life," yet the Babylonian Talmud does not make it clear that this was the function of the punishment.

99. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 58, no. 3169; KJ, no. 1375. See also al-Rabī' ibn Ḥabīb (attrib.), *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* no. 488.

100. On the subject, see the important article by Leah Kinberg, "Interaction Between This World and the Afterworld." On the related topic of communication occurring by way of dreams experienced sometimes by sleepers at the cemetery, see Jane Smith, "Concourse Between the Living and the Dead in Islamic Eschatological Literature," *History of Religions* 19 (1980): 224–236.

101. Many had the custom of visiting the graves every Friday, but Saturday before sunrise was also a popular time. The dead were especially aware of visits at these times, it was said. See Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr,* nos. 33–37.

102. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad,* vol. 2, no. 7070, concerning specifically *fitnat al-qabr;* al-Rabī' ibn Ḥabīb (attrib.), *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ,* no. 815, concerning more generally *'adhāb al-qabr.* See also al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 209.

103. On the cult of the saints, in addition to the studies cited earlier (n. 7 of the introduction to This volume), see the essays in James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward, eds., *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown* (Oxford, 1999).

104. See L. Gardet, *EI²,* s.v. "Du'ā'." Al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* devotes an entire book to various kinds of invocations, the *Kitāb al-Da'awāt* (no. 80), with chap. 37, nos. 6364–6366, covering the punishment of the grave. The concept of Muhammad's

intercession (*shafā'a*) on behalf of Muslims at the Day of Resurrection bears some semblance to but should not be confused with the invocation (*du'a'*) in favor of the dead under consideration. On *shafā'a,* see John Bowker, "Intercession in the Qur'ān and in the Jewish Tradition," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 11 (1966): 69–82; Eva Riad, "Šafā'a dans le Coran," *Orientalia Suecana* 30 (1981): 37–62.

105. George Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqil: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam* (Edinburgh, 1997), 209–213; Taylor, *Vicinity of the Righteous,* 52–53, 168–194.

106. E. Rowson, *Al-'Āmirī's Kitāb al-Amad 'alā l-abad,* 150–151. I have here followed closely Rowson's translation.

107. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, nos. 1361, 1378; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī,* KJ, 151–153; Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh,* 1:184. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6754, where Muḥammad also prefaces the statement in the subjunctive.

108. Al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 261–263, cites Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaf,* among other sources, for the first and third relations; and Ibn al-Jawzī, *'UYūn al-Ḥikāyāt,* for the second. Ironically, in 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf,* KJ, no. 6760, the shrouds of the elect are changed magically for shrouds from the Garden; see also no. 6208.

109. Quoted by al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr,* 148–149.

110. Timothy Insoll, "Death and Burial," in *The Archaeology of Islam,* 66–200, at 173–174. M. J. Kister, "Sanctity Joint and Divided," *JSAI* 20 (1996): 18–65, at 22–30, 35–*36,* and 39–42, shows how prominently tombs and relics figured in the sacred geography of Muslims.

111. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Qubūr,* nos. 8–11, 33, 32.

112. On the punishment of the grave in epitaphs, see pp. 30–31 of the present volume.

113. Al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Umm,* KJ, no. 3134; Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa',* KJ, nos. 609–610. The alternative prayer implies that even a Muslim free of sin should worry about the torture of the grave.

114. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 55, nos. 2781; see also nos. 2760–2762, 2770. See 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* KJ, no. 6757, for a statement, ascribed to Ibn Jurayj, that also hints at the importance of giving alms on behalf of the dead.

115. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk. 64, no. 3960.

116. Ibid., bk. 56, no. 3045; bk. 64, no. 3989; bk. 58, no. 3185; Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra,* 1:638ff. Needless to say, dying as a Muslim martyr was no guarantee against dismemberment. See E. Kohlberg, "Medieval Muslim Views on Martyrdom," 8, on the prohibition against mutilation.

117. See Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr,* no. 30. Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* bk., 63, no. 3883, on intercession for an uncle.

118. See p. 156 of the present volume, and n. 47 of chap. 5.

119. See Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London, 1973), chap. 1. Pointing out the "reformational" tenor of Muslim ritualism, William Graham, "Islam in the Mirror of Ritual," has suggested, with reference to Mary Douglas's work, that Islamic orthopraxy distinguishes itself from ritualist/antiritualist religions by embracing rituals while emptying them of symbolic efficacy.

120. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ,* KJ, chaps. 57–58. On the reward of following a funerary procession, as a supererogatory deed, see p. 144 of the present volume. Compare to the communal duty to bury the dead, discussed on p. 168 of the present volume.

121. Remember, for example, specifications about the number and fabric of shrouds, which do not spell out the implications of burial in different attire.

122. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr,* no. 68.

123. Ibid., nos. 62, 69.

124. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, bk. 61, no. 3617.
125. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr,* no. 93.

Epilogue. Death Rites and the Process of Islamic Socialization

1. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion* (New York, 1954), 47–53. This social-psychological view of the function of rituals as unifying social forces was developed earlier by Emile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* trans. J. Swain (New York, 1915), 337–461; the last chapter in this section deals with mourning rites, a test case for Durkheim's model. The Durkheimian model has influenced many anthropological inquiries. It stimulated Arnold van Gennep in his construction of rites of passages as mechanisms of social transition beginning with rites of separation and culminating in rites of incorporation; see Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage,* trans. M. Vizedom and G. Caffee (Chicago, 1960), especially chap. 8, which is devoted to funerals. Durkheim also influenced Victor Turner deeply. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago, 1969), 132, Turner tried to differentiate himself from Durkheim's notion of solidarity with the claim that groups of hippies were able to attain a sense of "*communitas*" by rituals that did not depend on an insider/outsider contrast. But This argument is not entirely convincing, since Durkheim saw the totemic principle as transcending divisions between one clan and another.

2. While analyzing the "dysfunctional" effects or divisive role of rituals in "modern" or "secular" societies, anthropologists have recognized the limitations of the Durkheimian model, given its concern with the function of rituals in small-scale archaic societies. In the process, anthropologists have elaborated a powerful but overly simple dichotomy between archaic and modern rituals. This dichotomy fails to account for the role of rituals in complex premodern civilizations, a subject to which anthropologists have devoted meager attention. See, for example, Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures,* chap. 6, an essay examining a modern Muslim funeral that failed to work according to Muslim legal norms. See also Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual* (Amsterdam, 1977), chap. 1; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. R. Nice (Cambridge, 1977), 124–39, 159–171, 188–197; idem, *The Logic of Practice,* trans. R. Nice (Stanford, Calif., 1990), chaps. 3, 5; and idem, *Language and Symbolic Power,* trans. G. Raymond and M. Adamson (Cambridge, 1991), 117–126.

3. Harvey Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Oxford, 2000) contrasts a "doctrinal" and an "imagistic" mode of religiosity with reference to the traditions of Melanesia. His model of interacting modes, presented in chapter 6, is not directly applicable to the case at hand, yet in several ways the "Islamic" and "Jāhilī" modes do correspond to Whitehouse's categories. Nevertheless, Whitehouse does not at all consider gender issues in his categorization of rituals.

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